



Library of the Theological Seminary,  
PRINCETON, N. J.

Division

SCC

Section

3095

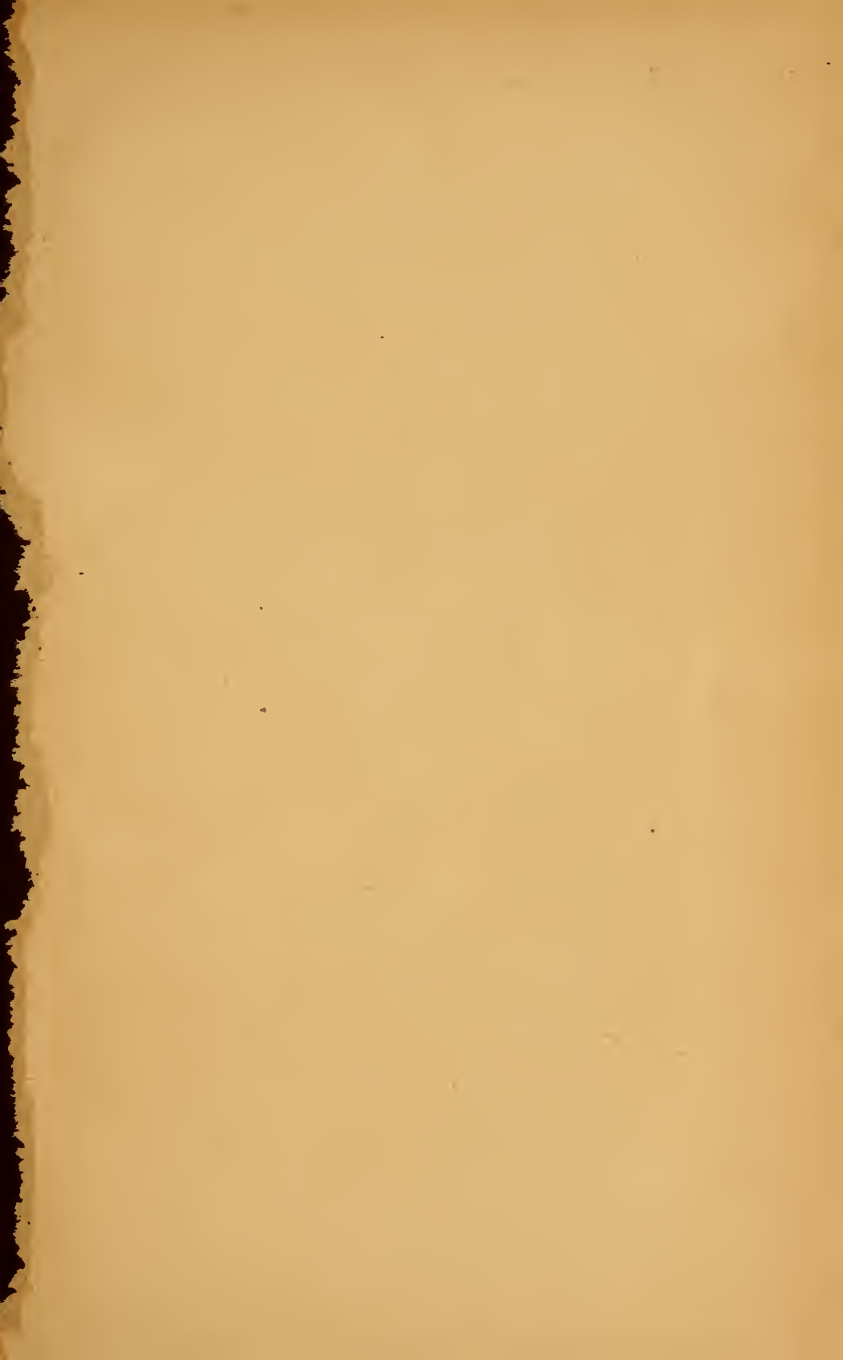
Shelf

Number















FAITH AND CHARACTER



# FAITH AND CHARACTER

BY

MARVIN R. VINCENT, D.D.

PASTOR OF "THE CHURCH OF THE COVENANT," NEW YORK

*Prof. N. J. Wyman Union Theol. Sem. N. Y.*

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"

EPHESIANS IV. 13

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

743 AND 745 BROADWAY

1880

COPYRIGHT BY  
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS.  
1880.

TROW'S  
PRINTING AND BOOKBINDING COMPANY,  
201-213 *East 12th Street,*  
NEW YORK.





To

MY DEAR FRIEND,

William Irwin, D.D.,

OF TROY, N. Y.,

IN MEMORY OF OUR YEARS OF HAPPY FELLOWSHIP

IN THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD,

I Dedicate this Volume.



## P R E F A C E .

---

THIS volume is composed of sermons, preached at different times to my congregation of the Church of the Covenant, and does not, therefore, claim to be the methodical development of a single topic.

At the same time, a reference to the table of contents will show that it is not devoid of a certain unity ; and that its title is fairly representative, and is not selected arbitrarily, nor from some incidental feature of a collection of miscellaneous discourses. The two thoughts of FAITH and CHARACTER underlie the whole book. Each sermon deals, either with the relations and bearings of character, or with the principle of faith in the unseen as its only permanent basis.

If the volume shall contribute, in any degree, to dissipate that indifferentism toward religion, which is rife, and which carries a worse menace than positive

unbelief; if it shall do aught, within the church itself, to prick that dangerous conceit that emotional raptures, or activity in church work, or regular ecclesiastical standing can be substitutes for solid goodness and for consistency of conduct; if it shall go to strengthen the emphasis upon the fact that religion is a development of character, and is not summed up in the single experience which inaugurates that development; if, in showing that character attains symmetry through discipline and conflict, it shall nerve some sincere but discouraged soul to fight its way across the storm-swept expanse between itself and its ideal; if, above all, it shall help any man to a larger and clearer view of the divine Saviour, and shall enable him to discover a new meaning in manhood and a new dignity and sweetness in duty through their relation to Jesus Christ, it will not have been written in vain.

MARVIN R. VINCENT.

COVENANT PARSONAGE, *January 6, 1880.*

# CONTENTS.

---

## FAITH.

	PAGE
I. FAITH IN THE UNSEEN.	
1. Seeing the Invisible. (Hebrews xi. 27.) . . .	3
II. INTERCOURSE WITH THE UNSEEN.	
2. "Because of his Importunity." (Luke xi. 5-8.) . . .	25
III. CHRIST THE INTERPRETER OF THE UNSEEN.	
3. "What think ye of Christ?" (Matthew xxii. 42.)	43
4. The Wardship of the Law. (Galatians iii. 24.) . . .	61
5. Sonship by Receiving Christ. (John i. 12.) . . .	81
6. Rest Given and Rest Found. (Matthew xi. 28-30.)	97
7. The Divine Gift of Wisdom. (James i. 5, 6.) . . .	117

## CHARACTER.

I. ITS INTEGRITY.	
8. The Patched Garment. (Luke v. 36.) . . .	135
II. ITS DEVELOPMENT.	
9. Infancy and Manhood in the Sphere of Faith. (Hebrews xi. 23-29.) . . . . .	153

	PAGE
10. The Divine Law of Education. (Deuteronomy xxxii. 10-12.) . . . . .	173
11. Good and Bad Building on the One Foundation. (1st Corinthians iii. 10-15.) . . . . .	193
III. ITS RISKS.	
12. Caution and Comfort for the Tempted. (1st Corinthians x. 12, 13.) . . . . .	211
13. Taste and Holiness. (Philippians iv. 8, 9.) . . . . .	231
14. Balaam. (2d Peter ii. 15.) . . . . .	249
IV. ITS INDEPENDENCE.	
15. Christian Self-Sufficiency. (Philippians iv. 11-13.)	269
V. ITS ATTITUDE TOWARD MEN.	
16. Christian Relations not after the Flesh. (2d Corinthians v. 16.) . . . . .	287
VI. ITS ACTIVE SIDE.	
17. Meat or Drudgery. (John iv. 34.) . . . . .	305
18. The Lesson of Moses' Rod. (Exodus iv. 2.) . . . . .	323
19. The Multiplied Oil. (2d Kings iv. 1-7.) . . . . .	341
VII. ITS ETERNITY.	
20. The Eternity of Godly Character. (1st John ii. 17.) . . . . .	361



SEEING THE INVISIBLE.

HEBREWS XI.

(27) For he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.



## I.

### SEEING THE INVISIBLE.

THIS chapter is a catalogue of the heroes of faith. The words of the text refer to Moses, and sum up and explain what the writer has been saying about his renunciation of the highest worldly advantages, for the sake of an unseen, future, and, humanly speaking, most improbable good. As the adopted son of the royal house of Egypt, he might have enjoyed the powers of sovereignty, the pleasures of wealth, and the pure delights of learned leisure. Instead, he chose a lot which converted his patrons into enemies, which withdrew him from the scene of his studies, and which insured him toil, anxiety, and vexation for the whole remainder of his life. Almost every day we see fanatics doing strange things, and things which are hurtful to themselves; but Moses was not a fanatic. He was a wise man in the *worldly* sense. He was not only an accomplished, but a *shrewd* man. He knew, as well as any sage in Egypt, how chimerical, how hopeless, how utterly senseless, such a movement as the migration of the Hebrews was, viewed from the standpoint of worldly wisdom. If he saw the matter from God's point of view, he was also quite competent to see it from Pharaoh's.

The explanation of this strange course is given us by the writer of this epistle in the words of our text. Moses ignored the law of worldly expediency, and worked and suffered under a higher law, as one who saw a lawgiver whom Egypt could not see, who felt the obligation of a law which Egypt did not recognize, who worked toward a result which did not enter into the dreams of Egypt's wisest, and who looked for a recompense unseen, intangible, yet richer than all the treasures of the Pharaohs. "He endured *as seeing Him who is invisible.*"

As we go through this chapter, we see that Moses was not alone in acting on this principle. The same principle underlies the work and the suffering of every one who is named in that wonderful catalogue; the principle of *faith*, of which all these men and women are cited as illustrations: and faith is declared to be nothing more nor less than *this clear seeing and realizing of that which is unseen by the world at large.* You read, in the first verse of this chapter, that faith is the *substance*, the *real being*, of things which to others are only matters of *hope*: it is the *demonstration* of things which are *not seen.*

You are not unfamiliar with the same thing on a lower plane—a region quite distinct from the sphere of religion. Every great inventor or discoverer, every great man, indeed, who, in any particular, is in advance of his age, illustrates it. A Columbus sees a new continent, where his age sees only a madman putting out to sea in quest of dreamland. A Palissy sees the potter's work improved and beautified,

where society sees only a fanatic ruining himself by building fires to destroy good cups and bowls. A Watt sees weights lifted and machinery driven, where his neighbors laugh at an idiot dreaming over a boiling teakettle. To men at large, these things are but *dreams, fancies, at best, hopes.* To *these* men they are *real facts.*

In the case of the heroes of this chapter, we find this sense of realness treated in its relation to one set of facts only: the facts, namely, of the invisible, spiritual world: the facts of the order, the government, and the sanctions of a *moral* universe, of which God is the administrator. That there is a God, that He governs the world, that He directs the thought and doing of men, that He loves and cares for them, that He calls them to positions and sets them duties, that He will fulfil His promises to them, that He will reward their well-doing and punish their evil, that it is both right and most profitable to obey Him, even though obedience entail present pain and loss—these and similar facts are the ones which faith made living and telling forces in the lives of Noah and Enoch, Abraham and Moses, David, and Samuel, and the prophets. Evidently the invisible world was very real to those men. Over the best of them, it had more power than this present, visible world. You know how powerfully their age influences men; how much it does to shape them; how hard and how rare it is for a man to rise above the great, accepted, unquestioned convictions of his time. Does it not then seem wonderful that in an age which did not at all realize the

fact of a future of the world, in which the present was "as much a boundary of the world's horizon, and stood as much upon the very edge of time as to-day stands," Abraham should have looked into an "indefinitely distant era of the world, and to an improved condition of the world," with a fixedness, a clearness, and a certainty which even our Lord remarked? "Your father, Abraham," He says, "rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad." Is it not strange that such a man should cast off the idolatry which was "pressed upon him with all the power of association and authority," and grasp the doctrine of one spiritual God, at whose commands and promises he forsakes the home of his fathers, and binds the son of his hopes to the sacrificial altar? Will anything but a sense of *reality* in unseen things send a man along such paths? And when we get into the region of the *Christian* heroes, we find the realization of the unseen world, and the sense of its power surprisingly intense and vivid. When a man can say, "For me to live is Christ:" "To depart from this life and to be with Christ is far better:" "My citizenship is in Heaven." "I walk by faith, not by sight:" "The things which are seen are *temporal*, but the things which are *not seen* are eternal"—it shows that the unseen, spiritual world is far other than a matter of guess, or even of mere intellectual faith to him. It is the very element in which he lives. He believes in it in such a way as that it has practical power over him, shapes him, controls him, makes him, in short, whatever he is in every relation. Men cannot be, as in the record

of this chapter, stoned, sawn asunder, destitute, afflicted, tormented, for the sake of One whom they have never seen, and of truths which get all their meaning from His person, without a very distinct and powerful sense of the *reality* of such a Being and of the practical bearing of such truths.

The Bible gives us these facts ; but is the Bible a book for to-day's living ? Is the Bible the only infallible rule of faith and practice ? Do we believe this ? If we do, how can we escape the conclusion that this clear seeing and realizing of the unseen, this constant, direct bearing of the unseen world upon life, plans, hopes, is commended to *us*, no less than to the men of older time ? Is there any reason why Enoch's walk with the invisible God, and Abraham's faith in the invisible God, should be to us mere matters of admiring allusion ? Or do we admit that Abraham's faith may, and ought to be reproduced, yea, improved upon in our lives ? Moses saw Him who is invisible. Is that fact stated in order to show us how much greater Moses' privilege was than ours, or is it the statement of *our* privilege to see as much if not more than Moses ?

If the Bible is the manual of living for you and me, we are shut up to the answer that the unseen world ought to be to us all that it ever was to the men of whom it tells us. If it was real to *them*, it should be real to *us*. If it imposed obligations, and gave directions, and ministered warning and comfort and hope to them, we are bound to look to it for the same things ; because, if the Bible does not mean this, it means



nothing whatever. The Bible, from beginning to end, is concerned with the establishment of an effective connection between the seen and the unseen worlds ; with bringing the things of sense under the dominion of the unseen, and with teaching us that this unseen world is the great, *dominant* fact, not only of the future, but of the present.

Thus we get down to the very practical question : Is the unseen world to us what it was to the men of the Bible? Do we look back with envy and with longing to Jacob's dream at Bethel and to his wrestle at Jabbok, to Moses on Sinai, to Elijah on Horeb, and feel that the present has robbed us of something which brought Heaven nearer to them? Do we live as though we saw Him who is invisible, and as if the things of the unseen world were substance and not shadow?

Understand me, I am not asking now whether we believe that there is a Heaven and a Hell ; a God, a special providence. If it is a matter of vital importance *what* a man believes, it is a matter of no less moment *how* he believes it, and what are the applications of his belief. I may fully believe in the electric telegraph, for instance. I may be able to give a perfectly correct and intelligible explanation of its principle and working. I may have a telegraphic apparatus set up in my room, with its batteries in good working order, and yet I may make no connections with anything outside, but may simply keep the polished machine ticking away without sending a message to a soul under the sun. Just so, it is en-

tirely possible for one to believe every essential truth of the spiritual world, and yet never give his belief a vital contact anywhere with his practical life. And it is that contact which is the important thing. The power of faith in the unseen upon the regulation of what is seen; the depth and sharpness of the stamp of the invisible upon the visible, is the true measure of our faith. You believe in God's being and attributes. Do those attributes make your life any better, or larger, or happier? You believe that there is an invisible world. What character does it set upon you? To what degree do you live in its atmosphere? You believe that the unseen imposes laws upon our life. Do you keep those laws? You believe that influences go forth from that invisible realm. Do you give yourself up to them? The unseen realm is a kingdom. Do you live in it as a subject? It is a kingdom not of this world. Are you of the world or not of it? Is the whole array of heavenly intelligences, facts, and laws, to you and to me like the far-off light of distant auroras, on whose cold splendors we merely gaze, which measure for us no times and seasons and send forth no warmth,—or are they as the sun in heaven, quickening and fructifying our lives? These are questions without the right answer to which it matters little how correctly we can say our catechisms, or how orthodox are our systems of faith.

So, then, I repeat my question. How real a thing is the unseen world to us? How much will we *do* under its power? How much will we *bear*? How

much will we *renounce*? How much does it restrain us? How much will we do and suffer to win its rewards? How much afraid are we of its retributions? One thing is certain, either it is or it is not real. If it *is*, in the very nature of the case it must be a *tremendous* reality, and the absence of the sense of its realness from any life is the most tremendous defect which it is possible to conceive.

Let us bring the matter to some practical tests. There, for instance, is the *substance* of belief—what we call *doctrine*. I do not think that the positive disbelief of people in the doctrines of the Bible is as remarkable or as dangerous as the perfect tranquillity with which they settle down upon the conclusion that it is quite indifferent what they believe. In anything which they are convinced is real, they show that they think it of very great consequence what they believe, and are at great pains to form an intelligent belief. If, for example, a capitalist holds five thousand shares of a certain stock, that is a very real thing to him. It represents so much capital. If he believes that the stock is selling at a premium when it is already below par and is daily going down, he knows very well that that belief, however sincere, will make a very appreciable difference in his income. So he is careful not to be betrayed into any wrong belief on the subject. Every fact which can help him to form a right belief is diligently sought out, and carefully weighed and studied. Yet often the very same man, if asked his belief respecting the great principles of religion, would say: "Well, I don't



know, I have not given much thought to such things. It is a matter of a good deal of uncertainty, any way; and if I try to do about right, I don't know that it makes much difference what I believe." Scores of people who do not say this in so many words, say the same thing by their lives; and that thing means that the question whether the world and society are moved by blind chance or guided by a loving Father in Heaven; whether they themselves are to live after this life or to return to the dust; whether

—“we fare

As summer gusts, of sudden birth and doom,  
Whose sound and motion not alone *declare*,  
But *are* their whole of being;”

where they are going to be when buying and selling and laughter and feasting shall be over forever; whether there is any answer beyond the grave to the questioning of their lonely hearts about their dead—they say the answer to such questions is a matter of indifference, and they are easily content to have the days slip away, leaving them unsettled. Do you not see that the radical defect with such is that the spiritual world has no *realness*—practically, no *existence* for them? How well has Pascal said of such, “The only shame is that there is no shame. Nothing shows more an extreme weakness of mind than to know not what is the unhappiness of a mind without God; nothing indicates more a bad disposition of heart than not to desire the truth of eternal promises; nothing is more cowardly than to brave God.

There are but two sorts of persons who can be called rational: either those that *serve* God with all their heart, because they know Him; or those that *seek* Him with all their heart, because they do not know Him."

Or, consider the way in which the Scriptures affect people. Remember, that if the Bible is not the revelation of the laws and forces of the spiritual world, and of the thought and feeling of its intelligences, it is nothing. But it is more than we sometimes suspect, to love and to trust the Bible as such a revelation. Some of you remember the first letter which came to you from home, while you were in the first homesickness of your school life. How you read it and re-read it, and stole looks at it in lesson time, and went away into quiet places to brood, and perchance to weep over its love-laden lines. And why? Because it came from a place which was the dearest reality of your existence. Because it told of persons and facts which formed your little world. Because it bore admonitions from those whose word gave the law to your life, and praises from those whose approval was your most coveted prize. Is the Bible any such thing as that to us? And observe, that one may be honestly interested in the Bible without having any such feeling as this. A poet may enjoy the poetry of Isaiah or of Job. An historian may become absorbed in Kings or Chronicles as illustrating secular history. A philosopher may study the character of Christ as a moral phenomenon. All these, good things though they are, yet attach, if I may so speak,

to the *outside* of the Bible. But it is a different matter when one loves the Bible as a message from home ; when he reads it as a traveller does his guide-book in a strange city, and studies it as a sailor studies his chart on a dangerous coast ; when he delights in it as the voice of the Father whom he loves, of the Savior in whom he trusts, as the manual of that kingdom to which his loyalty is pledged. You go into the cabin of a mountaineer in some wild region, and hanging up against the wall is an old lantern. Something peculiar in its shape or make attracts your attention for a moment, and you are turning away, when the mountaineer says to you : "I have no better friend than that old lantern. Many a starless night, when I have been among the ravines and precipices, climbing the crags, or threading the narrow sheep-paths, I should have been lost but for the spark which it kept from the boisterous wind. And just so, when we shall have begun to realize that the world is a dangerous place, that the journey to heaven lies amid rocks and pitfalls, and that light from heaven is indispensable to safe walking ; when we shall have laid up the memories of a few dark, tempestuous seasons, out of which only our Bibles saved us, we shall know what the Psalmist meant when he said : "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

Once more, look at *prayer*. It is not wonderful that men are skeptical about communication with the unseen world when they view prayer from without, as a phenomenon to be weighed in material

balances and tried by mechanical tests. No wonder the invisible world is unreal to them. He who knows prayer as an *experience*, from within the circle of communion with God, who lingers in that heavenly atmosphere, seeing Him who is invisible, asking and receiving, feeling his burdens drop off and his strength renew itself—can afford to smile at the bustling philosopher outside, knitting his brows over the question whether man *can* ask and receive from God. If I want to satisfy myself about prayer, I shall not run to the manufacturers of prayer-tests. Rather will I go and stand by Isaiah at the altar, while the posts of the door move at the voice of him that cries, and the live coal is laid by angel hands on the suppliant prophet's lips. Rather will I bow beside Elijah on Carmel, while his own life and the honor of Israel, hang on the issue of his prayer. Rather will I seek the chamber where Luther, prostrate before God, pleads for courage to stand for His truth before kings and potentates. In such scenes we learn how real the unseen world is to men. We see how they depend upon it ; what kind of help they seek from it ; what terrible issues they stake on its responses ; and how real and how mighty are the aids and comforts which come from it to them. The difference between such men's view of prayer and his who merely studies prayer as a phenomenon, is the difference between him who stands in the telegraph office, studying the machinery, and asking about the connections of the wires, and him whose wife or child is in deadly peril in a distant city, and who leans

over the operator's shoulder with set lips and straining eyes, as the ticking instrument resolves or deepens his agony of suspense.

You see the same thing in times of sorrow. You remember how, some years ago, the first Atlantic cable, which had lain broken in mid-ocean for nearly two years, was raised and repaired. From the moment that the telegraphic squadron set sail, an operator sat, night and day, at the European terminus, watching for signals. He told afterwards a weird story. Long before the grappling-iron had found it, the parted cable, under the power of mysterious electric currents, was writing grotesque signs and combinations with the sensitive indicator, sometimes even forming unmeaning sentences, as if the old sea were struggling to unbosom its awful secrets. At last the pencil of light moved as in the hand of a ready writer, and told the joyful story of success. The vague, stammering utterances of the sea were changed into living words of joy. Purpose, knowledge, will, were at the other end of the wire. Thus it often is in human experience. Men get down at times into depths where the world of sense becomes unreal to them through their own misery. The inward life is one wild, chaotic waste, full of sighs and murmurs and cries for light and peace. The messages that come from that waste are as idle jargon telling only of chance and change. And when, under such conditions, you find these souls holding by something unseen, never losing faith in Divine order, feeling the thrill of divine love and comfort amid all



the confusion, strengthened not only to bear and to work, but to coin sorrow into power, you may be sure that that unseen thing, whatever it is, is a *real* thing to them. You may call it phantasy, but it is none the less true that they endure as seeing the invisible. And I think we never have so keen a sense of the realness of the unseen world, as when we see a racked, tempest-beaten soul thus kept in perfect peace. The seen and the unseen appear to have changed places. The eyes of the children of sorrow are anointed, and almost everything but the unseen becomes *unreal*. God and Christ, heavenly strength, the clasp of the everlasting arms, have become the great facts of that life.

I go back to my old question : How real is the spiritual world to us? What does it stand for in your life and in mine? Must we wait until we are in the next world to feel its power and to obey its promptings? Or does not the Apostle Paul give us more than a hint in those words "our citizenship *is* in Heaven," that we may live in this world and in direct contact with Heaven at the same time? You have often marked a blind man walking the streets. A score of things are going on round him ; incidents which draw the attention of every eye are taking place within a few yards of him. How sadly impressive is his entire unconsciousness of it all! He does not bow his head at the missile hurled by a careless hand. He does not check his footsteps at the approach of his dearest friend. He walks straight toward the yawning pit which workmen have opened

in the street. Yet is this any more sadly impressive than the spectacle of the multitudes who walk this world as if unconscious that there is any other, blind to the hints and suggestions and symbols and monitions which come crowding up and compassing their very path and their lying down? How such must appear—yea, how many of those who profess to be walking by faith in the unseen must appear to the tenants of the spiritual region, the cloud of witnesses compassing this earthly sphere of ours. Oh, if our eyes were but opened, how common things would teem with lessons and suggestions of the unseen. How often we should see teachers where we see but stocks and stones; how often we should stand unshod on ground which we profane with careless feet, and all along the line of our daily walk find

“Earth crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God;”

and how the things which now seem to us so great, the baubles we covet, the praises for which we are impatient, the successes on which we stake our happiness, the failures which go well-nigh to break our hearts, would dwindle and fade in the presence of the tremendous facts of that vast, mysterious realm which we so often treat as though it had no existence. This blindness is not enforced. We may see if we will. Thank God, the awful picture of the German poet is false in every line, wherein he depicts the generations of men between the past and the future as between two black curtains, where they stand bearing

torches, cheated now by their own magnified shadows, and now by the images which poets, statesmen, tricksters, have drawn on the curtain of the future according to their fantastic humors, while no voice comes out of the darkness beyond, but only a hollow echo answers the agonized questioner, as when one calls into an abyss. It is false, I say. The Christian knows what are the *powers* of the world to come. The invisible world is not silent to ears which Christ has touched. It has something besides fancies or juggleries for those on whose eyes He has laid His hand; and such texts as this, combine with myriads of later testimonies to tell us how men have stood between the past and the future in good cheer and in buoyant hope, hearing real voices behind the veil, and passing behind it at last, not as taking a leap in the dark, but as departing to be with Christ, which is far better.

Young ladies of the graduating class,<sup>1</sup> it would be an ungracious task to attempt to throw a shadow over the bright outlook upon which you gaze from the doors of this peaceful retreat which open now to let you out into the world. For one, I have no disposition to undertake it. On the other hand, I do most confidently believe that in directing your attention to this theme, I am pointing out to you the way to draw most brightness and sweetness out of the world; the way to the solution of some of those problems

---

<sup>1</sup> This sermon was preached as a baccalaureate to the graduating class of Packer Institute, Brooklyn, 1878.



which so often embitter life and blight hope. If the subject seems a grave one, its selection is justified by the fact that the view which you shall take of it and shall carry out into practice, will determine the character of your life and the character of your destiny.

This issue confronts you at the commencement of your career, the issue between the claims of the seen and of the unseen. It will be well for you to face it decisively and intelligently. The world has changed in many things, but it is the same old world in stoutly maintaining the superior authority of that which is seen, as against that which is apprehended by the spiritual sense. It comes to meet you with tangible pleasures and rewards; with its own debased standards of right and wrong; substituting pleasure for duty, and what is tasteful for what is right. Innocent though you may be of metaphysics, the cold materialism of its so-called "advanced thought" will find its way to you as surely as the tide works up into the little creeks and inlets far back from the shores, and with its subtle touch will seek to paralyze the faith which lays hold on the unseen world. And your only safeguard will be the conviction, firmly rooted in your hearts, and faithfully acted out in your lives, that you are the subjects of an invisible kingdom, of which God is the king; that that realm, which includes Christ and duty and spiritual communion, is appointed for your *daily* dwelling-place, and that your first and highest allegiance is due there.

Some of you are familiar with that beautiful scene

in Schiller's drama of Wallenstein, where a maiden timidly enters the chamber of her father's astrologer, and finds herself in a circle of colossal statues, kingly forms representing the planets.

" Each one in his hand  
A sceptre bore, and on his head a star ;  
And in the tower no other light was there  
But from these stars : all seemed to come from them."

Thus they stood in their silent majesty, telling her of the power of the heavenly intelligences in shaping human fates, and appealing to her to seek to learn her destiny at their hands. So I would fain think of you ere you go forth into the bright sunshine of "that new world which is the old," turning aside to the circle of

" The great intelligences fair,  
That range above our mortal state ;"

and seeing only by the "great light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," ask there to have the lines of your destiny drawn, and come forth leaving it in Christ's keeping forever. Those lines will lead you away from much which the world calls success. You will follow them down to many a low place, where tears are shed, and weak and helpless hands are stretched forth in mute appeal, and whither the world will not follow to minister to you ; but when you shall find yourself working side by side with Him who came to minister, you will find yourself in the ranks of the givers and not of the receiv-

ers. You will be led in paths of sacrifice, where you shall find your highest joy in duty, your sweetest rest in bearing Christ's yoke and burden, your abiding comfort in seeing Him who is invisible. Your whole education will have been to little purpose, if, with all your mental discipline and trained perception, your spiritual sense shall not have been sharpened to look straight through the glamour and mirage of this world to the things which are real to God and to angels. I can ask no better thing for you than thus to walk under a constant sense of the power and reality of the unseen world; no better thing than that which was said of that old, old saint who passed to heaven by a gate unknown to other men: "He walked with God, and he was not, for God took him."



“BECAUSE OF HIS IMPOR-  
TUNITY.”

LUKE XI.

- (5) And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves ;
- (6) For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him :
- (7) And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not : the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed ; I cannot rise and give thee.
- (8) I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet *because of his importunity*, he *will* rise and give him as many as he needeth."

## II.

### “BECAUSE OF HIS IMPORTUNITY.”

“LORD, teach us to pray.” This was the request which drew from Christ that wonderful answer of which this parable forms a part ; and surely, even the disciples who made the request could never have dreamed of the depth of their own ignorance of this subject, until they saw how it unfolded under Christ’s touch. It is worth a thought whether we, at this late time, have gotten all the beauty and fragrance out of that perfect flower of the life of Jesus—the Lord’s prayer. This, however, was but the first part of the answer to the disciples’ request. While this conveyed to them the *mode* of prayer, it remained to inform them concerning the *spirit* of prayer, and this Our Lord does through the parable of our text.

Like all such utterances of Christ, this draws its material from the ordinary life and incidents of the time. The deep stillness which settles upon an Eastern city soon after nightfall, is broken by the urgent call of a man under a neighbor’s window. “Friend ! friend !! Lend me three loaves ! A guest has arrived at my house.” Not a strange occurrence in the East, where so many travel in the night to avoid the burning heat of the day. “Friend, lend me three

loaves. My guest has taken me unawares. He is a hungry traveller. My larder is empty, I have nothing to set before him." And the answer is that of a man who cares chiefly for his own comfort; a churlish answer enough: "Trouble me not. My door is shut and bolted. The household have gone to rest. I cannot rise and give thee." But the applicant is not so easily disposed of. The ungracious neighbor is not to be left so comfortably to his rest. Hardly has he settled himself on his couch when the knock at the door comes again, and the call is repeated; and again and again, until, for very peace's sake, he is constrained to rise and give his persistent neighbor what he wants. "Though he will not rise and give him because he is his *friend*, yet *because of his importunity*, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth." Then follows the Lord's application: "When ye pray, go thus to God's door, in *dead earnest*, like the importunate friend. *Ask, seek, knock*. Ye shall receive, ye shall find, the door shall be opened." This is the great lesson of the parable. GOD URGES US TO BE URGENT WITH HIM.

Let us observe, before we go further, that this parable does not teach that we can get anything we want from God, if we are only persistent enough. The parable is to be read in the light of the Lord's prayer which precedes it. It is as if Christ had said: "After this manner pray. Let your petitions breathe such needs as are expressed in this form of prayer; and when ye pray thus, asking for that which God himself bids you ask, then pray with assurance and with



persistence.” When a man’s petition falls within the circle of the Lord’s prayer, he is like one who has the written credentials of a king, entitling him to admission to his palace and person. The lackeys at the gate may repulse and mock him, he cannot be driven away. He comes back after every repulse, holding forth the signature of his sovereign, until he makes his way within.

And it is also worth noting how strongly our Lord puts this duty of earnestness in prayer by the very word which he uses. “Importunity” does not begin to convey the force of it. Literally the word is *shamelessness* : *impudence* : and in the parallel parable of the unjust judge, to which I shall have occasion to refer more than once, the judge uses the same word which Paul afterwards employs to express the keeping his body in subjection—the boxer’s word—to strike under the eye, so that his words, literally rendered, would run thus: “Because this widow troubleth me I will avenge her, lest, by her continual coming she beat me black and blue.” I never get this idea so clearly before me as in reading that story of Abraham’s intercession for Sodom. I never can prevent that sense of *impudence* coming uppermost as I follow the patriarch through his plea for that horrible moral cesspool, Sodom, and hear him beating down from fifty to ten. Almost anybody but Abraham would have thought God’s proposal to save the city for the sake of fifty righteous men, a wonderful stretch of Divine mercy. On ordinary principles of justice Abraham had no case at all; and yet every concession

only encourages him to venture farther, until one fairly blushes for him, and wonders how he can have the face to ask again. But this is the spirit which God encourages in His children when they pray. He does not think of it as impudence. He only uses the invidious word to convey to us more forcibly the holy boldness of faith. To Him, the real shamelessness is, when His own dear children, purchased with the blood of His son, and with His offer in their hands to give them all things freely with Him, make meagre requests, and come to His throne like trembling beggars and not like the children of a king.

The question will at once arise then, why is God, if He is so gracious, represented under the figure of a churlish person : of one who refuses to put himself to a little inconvenience for a friend's sake ; or, as in the other parable, to an unrighteous judge who grants a request merely to save himself trouble ? Does not this look rather as if prayer had some reluctance on God's part to overcome ?

I reply, no. The contrary is the truth. In the first place, such an assumption is squarely in the face of Scripture, which everywhere emphasizes God's willingness to give good gifts to His children. Men are urged to ask, to ask large things, and are told that whatsoever they ask in Christ's name they shall receive. And this is just what the illustration of the parable is intended to convey. The course of reasoning is from the worse to the better. The argument lies thus : If a churlish man can be prevailed on by the importunity of a neighbor, to give him bread at

an unseasonable time, how much more will a gracious Father listen to the request of His own child who cannot ask unseasonably, because He has told him to pray always. If an unrighteous judge can be overcome by the petition of a stranger, coming in the way of business, and besieging him with importunity which he hates, shall not the righteous Judge of all the earth listen to the cry of His own chosen in the prayer which He loves to hear? So, the more ill-natured the neighbor, the more unjust the judge, if importunity can prevail with them, so much the stronger is the argument for its success with a just and loving Father in Heaven.

Why, then, the importunity at God's gate at all? What place is there for urgency and persistence if God's willingness to give is perfect, and God's sure promise to give on record? Why not simply ask and receive?

Simply because man's apprehension of that willingness and faith in that promise are not perfect. If they were, there would be nothing in the kingdom of grace but this sweet, calm interchange of asking and receiving, and the consequent fulness of joy. But even God's children are not always well acquainted with Him; and prayer is the great means of getting acquainted with Him and of getting hold of the deep, rare meaning of those precious words, "Our Father." When a man once practically understands those words throughout, (and he never can understand them otherwise than practically,) he has the answer to the central petition of the Lord's prayer. For him the

kingdom is already come. He dwells in God and God in him, and abiding in God, he asks what he will, and it is done. Prayer, I repeat, is a means to this consummation. It is the arena where God disciplines man's faith so that he may know and believe the love which God hath toward him. And, therefore, God sometimes seems to a weak faith to imitate the churlishness of the neighbor and the injustice of the judge. He delays His answer when His children cry. The judge does not move to vindicate. The door does not open. The hand with the loaves is not thrust out. And faith, as it stands waiting before the closed door, must needs summon up its persistence. It must refresh its memory with the exceeding great and precious promises; it must push away rising doubts, and crowd down impatience, and hold fast to God's faithfulness through all His delays. God knows very well that, in such a contest, faith not only prevails finally, but grows stronger. Hence He often sends the untimely guest in the hours of darkness, forcing his householder to rise and seek the bread of heaven, and then hiding Himself in clouds and darkness. And in this He deals very much as you do when you hold your little child upon your knee, and lift above his head the toy he desires, and hold it for a while out of reach of his hand; and that not to tantalize him, but to train his eye, and to teach him the use of his hands, and to exercise his limbs. And so when God hides Himself from His child, it is that faith, stimulated by difficulty, may forget its fear, and breathe itself out in mighty ur-

gency, and stay at the mercy-seat until divine love rise and reveal its beaming face at the open door and bid the suppliant come in and help himself. There is nothing which delights God more than such a faith in His goodness and love and power, as will persist in large demands upon these ; yea, increase its demands in the face of obstacles. He loves to hear men assert that faith in prayer. He smiles, amid the clouds and darkness which are round about Him, to hear the feet of faith coming steadily up the hill difficulty, never slackening its pace, but strong and exultant in the knowledge of light above the clouds.

There was that Syrophœnician woman who came to Jesus asking him to cast the devil out of her daughter. If you have seen a mother meet a physician as he came into the room where her child hung between life and death, you can get some faint sense of the agony of that Greek mother's plea for her tormented child. And he answered her not a word ; and when he did speak there was no hope nor comfort in the words, cold as chiselled marble : " I am not sent to you, but to Israel." Very possibly she knew that. She had called him son of David. There was no answer to that. He was sent to the Jews. Nothing for her but to clasp his feet in her anguish and cry " Lord, help me ! If not of right, at least of mercy !" And I have often wondered how the pitying tenderness of Christ pent itself up long enough to utter that withering reply : " It is not meet to take the children's bread and give it to dogs." But if her faith had been wavering before, that last thrust stung it into full

vigor. She would contest the day even with the Son of David. That he had the power she knew. She would not believe that he had the heart to refuse her. He had given her an argument, and she met him on his own terms. "Truth, Lord, grant that I am not a child, but only a dog : I ask but a dog's portion. I do not claim the privileges of a daughter of Israel. I ask not for the solid meat, nor for the dainties of the table. I take my place among the dogs, and I ask but for my share of the crumbs ; for the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the master's table." Christ was conquered, as he expected and wanted to be. Hungry as she had been for sympathy and help, he had yearned still more to help her, and now he gave his love and power full vent, and put both at her command : "Oh, woman, great is thy faith : be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

Now, in the light of this parable, we get upon solid ground concerning that which some are pleased to call "wrestling with God in prayer," a phrase from which I confess that I shrink, and which certainly conveys to many minds that utterly unscriptural idea of wresting something from God by persistence and struggle. This parable very plainly teaches that if there is any wrestling at all, it is not with God, but with things which stand between us and God : with self, with doubt, with unbelief, with fear, with the devil. Whatever wrestling there is, is the vigorous effort of faith to push through and over these things to God ; and when faith once gets there, it does not wrestle, surely. It rests. It abides in God. It asks



and receives. It is kept in perfect peace. An eminent minister in a discussion on this subject, not long ago, said : “ God puts His blessings high up, as He puts His choicest prospects on the top of His Righis and Matterhorns ; and we must wrestle and climb before we can enjoy them.” I say no. God puts His choicest blessings so low down that a little child’s faith can reach them. And where we have to climb, the mountains are of our making, raised by our worldliness and pride and unbelief. There is where the wrestling comes in. Not with God. He keeps back nothing. When He gave the world Jesus Christ He had nothing better to give it, and so He said, “ All things are yours with him—freely.” But we are kept back because we doubt this very thing, that all things are ours ; and God sometimes keeps us back Himself, so that we may overthrow that doubt, and get our foot on its neck, and strangle it before we go farther. Do not mistake that for a wrestle with God. Once get the doubt out of the way, and you will not find God in your way.

Thus it is only after we have studied the lesson of this parable that we are prepared to read intelligently those verses which follow, and which are so often quoted independently. From the parable they flow naturally enough. Such being the power of importunity with a churlish neighbor, the same earnestness will surely bring a gracious answer from a gracious God. Therefore, ask, seek, knock, and ye shall find a loving response. Why not ? Will even a human father mock his son with a stone, when he asks for bread ? “ If ye then, being evil, know how to

give good gifts unto your children," how much more shall the perfect One, the sinless God, the Heavenly Father with His all-embracing, consummate love, give the Holy Spirit, the best of all gifts, and which sums up in itself all other gifts, to them that ask Him ?

And when God does answer, you observe that He does not confine His gift to the strict limits of the petition. When the householder is once roused by the importunity of his neighbor, he not only gives him the three loaves, for which perhaps he asked out of delicacy as the very least that would suffice, but "as many as he needeth:" enough to spread a bounteous repast. And when God delays giving, it is not only to encourage faith to press for that particular gift, but to introduce it to a larger range of gifts: to bring it to a better acquaintance with Himself in whom are all gifts. A praying soul, under such circumstances, is like a thirsty man following up the windings of a clear cold stream, but unable to get down to the water's edge because the banks are so steep. He walks mile after mile along the precipitous shores, and the sun is hot, and he is faint, and his thirst is aggravated by the sparkling water below; but by and by he finds himself among the springs, at the source of the stream, high up where the fountains are sheltered, and clear and exhaustless, and he bows down and drinks his fill. God is better than all His gifts, and the object of prayer, as has already been said, is to make us acquainted with Himself. Your boy comes to you and asks you to buy him a fishing-rod; and he says: "I saw one to-day in a window,



on such a street, which was just what I want. Can't I go down now and buy it?" And you say, "No, not to-day. Wait a little. You shall have your rod." And doubtless the lad is disappointed; perhaps a little sullen for the time, and a week passes and he hears nothing about his rod, and he begins to say to himself: "I wonder if father has not forgotten all about it." Then, just at the end of the week, you put into his hands a better rod than he has ever seen before, and with it a complete outfit for his sport, and the boy is overwhelmed with surprise and pleasure. And yet the main thing in all this is not that your son has received what he wanted. You meant he should have that; but the gift won, through delay, has given him a new view of his father's wisdom, and a new confidence in his affection, which makes him say, "Hereafter, when I want anything of this kind, I will leave it all to Father." That is the great point gained. And so the main thing which a man gains when God at last answers his prayer with the gift which he asked, is not the gift, but the clearer consciousness that God is better than His gifts, that he has all things in God. Thus with the three loaves which he asked, he gets the freedom of his heavenly Father's house; all the luxuries of the heavenly table. So that Syrophœnician woman, having won the gift she asked of Christ, found Christ himself at her service. Not only "thy daughter is healed," but "be it unto thee even as thou wilt." Solomon asked for wisdom, and God answered him: "Lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart, and I have

also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honor." Job, from the midst of his distress, cries, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him," and the Lord not only renewed his former prosperity, but blessed him more than at the beginning. When God opens the door He gives as many as the applicant needeth ; not by the measure of little, weak, human petitions, but "according to the riches of His glory." He gives all things, but all things with Christ, a richer gift than all things beside.

And from this thought we get a broader outlook upon the character of importunate prayer. It is not only urgency and persistence on special occasions and with a view to special favors. True prayer is not only the soul's striving for some particular thing, but the soul's desire for God as its life, and the giver of every gift. And just to the degree in which the soul recognizes that God is its life, that man lives not by bread alone but by every word of God, not by God's gifts but by God Himself—to that degree the desire for God will span the life. The life will be a life of importunate prayer, in that it will be a continuous aspiration after God, a prayer without ceasing, a continuing instant in prayer. "That soul," as one most beautifully says, "that is accustomed to direct herself to God upon every occasion ; that as a flower at sun-rising conceives a sense of God in every beam of His, and spreads and dilates itself toward Him, in a thankfulness, in every small blessing that He sheds upon her ; that soul who, whatsoever string be stricken in her, base or treble, her high or

her low estate, is ever turned toward God, that soul prays sometimes when it does not know that it prays.”

We are urged then, in this parable, to earnest, continuous prayer.

1st. By the character of the Friend at whose door we knock. Oh, how this chapter throws the tenderness and magnanimity and patience of God into relief against the narrowness and churlishness of men. On what a grand scale is His giving as compared with the stinted giving of human selfishness. Is He your friend to-day? Do you know Him from personal acquaintance, from having sought His doors in the midnight when some unwelcome visitant made your couch uneasy, and drove sleep from your eyes; or from still, sweet communings in the breaking of the day, when you awoke and found yourself with Him? Do you know Him as a Father and friend, as a co-worker and sympathizer? If so, you know what it is to pray. Knowing Him thus, as the God of your life, the source of your joy, the fountain of your power, you cannot be content without being often at His door, yea, dwelling in the very secret of His tabernacle continually.

2d. This duty and privilege of importunate prayer is urged by our needs. The untimely guests are ever coming, as our Lord knew they would be, when He put upon our lips the prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Need, helplessness, weakness, ignorance, sorrow, are not exceptional incidents in our lives; they are the very atmosphere in which we

live, the staple of our existence, and through them we learn, if in no other way, that men need always to pray and not to faint.

3d. This duty is urged by the encouragements which it presents. With such a friend, who need faint in prayer? The trouble is that we do not always know our friend, and so mistake Him and do Him injustice. We accuse Him of churlishness, when He keeps us waiting only that He may feed us more richly: may give us not only the three loaves, but Himself and all His riches of grace and glory.

“It is not so, but so it looks,  
 And we lose courage then.  
 And doubts will come if God hath kept  
 His promises to men.

Ah! God is other than we think,  
 His ways are far above;  
 Far beyond reason's height, and reached  
 Only by childlike love.”

Prayer has a history of victories, enough to encourage the weakest heart. The faith which has kept its hold on the promises and has pressed its suit in spite of all delays, has developed a strength which has filled history with marvels. The old Greek philosopher used to say, that if he had a lever long enough, and a place somewhere outside the world to stand upon, he could move the planet. Revelation has furnished the place. The mercy-seat, where the Christian stands, is far above the seething and turmoil of earth. Prayer is a lever which puts earth at

the disposal of heaven, and, plying that lever with the strong arm of faith, the feeblest child of God works results which fill earth with wonder, and hell with dismay and rage.

Oh, my brethren, fail not to use the power God thus puts into your hands. You have great needs, large desires, bitter sorrows, vast enterprises ; be not driven from your place at God's doors. Stand there though He delay long. Plead His faithful promises. Let no doubts of the love and faithfulness of your friend make you chary of asking large things.

“ — Lose not heart,  
But learn what God is like,  
And in the darkest battle-field  
Thou shalt know where to strike.”

Remember that it is through faith and patience you shall inherit the promises ; and the day shall come when the importunity of prayer shall be changed into the victory of faith, the doors shall be opened, and you shall be satisfied with the fulness of His house.



“WHAT THINK YE OF  
CHRIST.”

MATTHEW XXII.

- (41) While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,  
(42) Saying, What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is he?
-



### III.

#### “WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?”

THERE is a familiar saying to the effect that fools can easily ask questions which wise men cannot answer. As a naked statement, it is true enough ; but so far as it implies that all the difficulty or all the wisdom involved in question and answer are on the side of the answerer, it is quite false. It is doubtless the mark of a wise man to be able to answer questions well ; but it is the mark of a higher wisdom to be able to ask them pertinently. This is a distinguishing trait of every great teacher. Socrates owes his eminence among the ancient sages largely to this power ; and Jesus Christ is distinguished by it above all other teachers. A volume might be written upon the questions of the Son of man. If we study them, we shall find them adapted, in most cases, not merely to bring out appropriate answers, but to set the mind of him to whom they were addressed at work upon some of their fresh and remote relations. When Christ asked a question, it usually drew, not only upon one's memory and knowledge, but also upon his reasoning power. Thus, he often set on foot, by a simple question, a train of thought which exposed to a false reasoner his own sophism, or

opened a new and startling view of an old truth to the unthinking. Some of his most instructive parables are thus put in the form of question: "What think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep and one of them be gone astray, will he not leave the ninety and nine and seek the lost? What woman, if she lose one piece of silver out of ten, will not sweep for the one? What think ye? Which of the two sons who were sent into the vineyard did the will of his father?"

Our text introduces a question of this character: not a profound question, apparently; to a Pharisee it might well have seemed an absurd question: "Whose Son is the Christ?" "Art thou a Jew and askest that question of us? Does any true child of Abraham dream of the Messiah's coming through any other line than David's?" And, as we see, the question was asked only that through the answer which, as Jesus knew, was so ready on their lips, they might be brought to contemplate the divine as well as the human lineage of the Messiah: to acknowledge the Son of God in the Son of man, David's divine Lord in David's son.

Modern criticism would leave the matter just here, as an incident in the life of Christ, having no significance beyond the immediate matter in hand. It was an ingenious dialectic artifice, intended to confound the Pharisees, and it succeeded. It raised a question concerning a prominent character in Jewish prophecy, and left the Jewish teachers to settle it as they could. It is a question which in no way concerns the present.

But is this true? Can we stop here? Is that question a merely local and historical one? Certainly, if Christ was only a Jewish Messiah; certainly, if Christ was only a teacher like Socrates or Aristotle, a product of his age. But if Christ, as he claims, has a relation to every creature in all the world, if his precepts are given for all mankind, if it be true that he has been lifted up to draw all men unto him, then the question does not stop with the confusion of the Pharisees. It moves on, demanding an answer from every age. It is as truly a living question to-day as on the day it was asked; a question touching alike our thinking and our living. “What think ye of Christ?”

However we regard it, whether as local or universal, whether as temporary or permanent, there is one assumption distinctly underlying this question, namely, that it relates to a subject of common interest, and one, therefore, about which every man may be expected to have some kind of an opinion. There are some questions which man would be a fool to ask outside of a circle of specialists. If an astronomer were to ask of the crowd in the cabin of a Brooklyn ferry-boat, “What do you think of the transit of Venus?” probably nine-tenths of the crowd would wonder what he was talking about. If he should ask the same people, “What do you think of a return to specie payment?” opinions would be offered in abundance. There are, in short, subjects on which every man is presumed to think; and to be without an opinion about them exposes him to contempt.

Of this nature was the Messianic question in Christ's time. Christ, in speaking of the Messiah, alludes to him as a well-known character: "What think ye of *the* Christ?" The subject of the most glowing prophecies, the centre of expectation to a proud but degraded people, his coming looked for with the most ardent hope, and prayed for with fast-falling tears—what Jewish child could be ignorant of the Christ?

Now, when I say that Christ occupies to-day precisely the same position with reference to current thought, I do not merely state an opinion that the subject is as important now as then: I state a fact, let it be accounted for as it may, that a man who thinks at all can hardly be in contact with nineteenth century civilization, and not be compelled to think of Christ. All attempts to banish Him into the region of remote history are in vain. The age has gotten past other men. Plato, Socrates, Cæsar, Alexander, Homer and Virgil—all confessedly great men, are yet instinctively felt to belong to the past. But the age does not get past Christ. He is as distinctly, yea, more distinctly, a fact of the nineteenth century than of the first. In a hundred different ways he appears in the philosophy, the politics, the social science, the statesmanship, the language, the ordinary customs of the present. He is historical, but he is more than historical. He is a memory, but he is also a power, and a growing power; and the position of modern society with reference to Christ is very well represented by Pilate's dilemma when the Saviour was brought before

him. He could not but respect him ; he wanted to avoid the responsibility of dealing with him. He sent him to Herod, and Herod sent him back ; and he had to dispose of him in some way, and Pilate never had a harder question to settle than that which he propounded to the Jews, “What shall I do then with Jesus of Nazareth, who is called Christ ?” Christ is in the way of the nineteenth century. He cannot be waved out of the way, nor argued out of the way, nor patronized out of the way, nor driven out of the way, nor ignored. He must be confronted and dealt with, no matter how many Pilates desire to wash their hands of him. He was a troublesome fact in his own time, but the trouble has taken on a thousand new forms since that. His own time dealt with him at last, and thought it had gotten him safely out of the way ; but the resurrection disappointed its hopes, and Christ, being raised from the dead, has been proving to every succeeding age that He dieth no more ; and an age that is annoyed by His presence, and stirred into opposition by His power, is yet forced to hear, with chagrin, the words so dear to His disciples : “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

I say these are not opinions, they are facts : facts patent to any judicious observer. Remand Christ to his own time ! Why the most superficial student cannot help seeing how the stream of Christian history keeps breaking, all along the line, into the current of secular history, and mingling with its waters, until sometimes the history of a period is mainly the his-

tory of the Christian church. Take out all the elements which Christ and his followers have contributed to the story of nineteen centuries, and you will blot out at least two-thirds of that story.

Or, take Christ as he comes forward in the familiar institutions and customs of society. You come upon him constantly, just as you come upon churches in the streets, or shrines by foreign roadsides. When you shall go down to your offices to-morrow, and begin to write your letters, the first one you write will contain in its date a recognition of Christ—"the year of our Lord." You may have more than one call in the course of the day to contribute to schemes for the moral and intellectual elevation of the poor. Who, in all the old civilizations ever dreamed that the poor had aught to do but to keep down at the bottom of the social fabric, where birth and poverty had placed them? Who, before Christ, ever troubled himself to inquire whether a poor man had any soul or mind to educate; still less to give him knowledge or moral culture which might make him an intruder into higher circles, or a less passive tool of the villainies of his superiors? It was Christ's idea to preach a gospel to the poor, a gospel with all that that term involves of mental and spiritual culture; and that idea, with all its blessed outgrowth, is an accepted fact in modern civilization, a part of its machinery, a thing of which civil government takes cognizance, and for which you find it a most natural thing to make provision, when you lay out the scheme of your yearly expenditures. A thousand



social regulations and ordinary decencies which have become a second nature to you, the violation of which you resent as trenching upon common propriety, have their origin in Christ's teachings. Your very speech betrays the Galilean accent as unmistakably as did Peter's. How many of the most familiar words upon your tongue have gotten their accepted meaning solely through the contact of Christian ideas, yea, have been dragged up out of low and vile associations to be the heralds of him who spake as never man spake. "Talent," a word of the money-market, associated only with traffic or with extortion, received a stamp which it has carried ever since, when Christ uttered the parable of the five, two, and one talents. "Sacrament," the name which carries with it to us the whole group of sweet memories, solemn reflections, joyful hopes, which cluster round the Lord's table—what gave that meaning to a word of the camp, a word linked with blood and fire and disciplined brutality, the word for the Roman military oath? These are only specimens of hundreds which might be cited in illustration of the fact that common speech perpetuates the ideas of Christ. You can send your children to no school where they will not come into contact with influences, and be shaped by forces which have had their rise in Christ. Every one of us, in short, is the product of a Christian civilization, and its mark is on us. We cannot deny our birthright. We are children of Christian influences, moulded by Christian associations; our habits of thought unconsciously modified by Christian forces,

our lives unconsciously regulated by Christian rules. The very fact that you or I can deny Christianity if we choose, or accept and practise it through any denominational medium that we choose, without danger to person or property from church or state, is a result of Christianity. Frame a community, the first article of which shall be to reject and violate every precept of Christ, and ere sunset you shall find your doors assailed by the decency, the culture, the refinement, the virtue, the authority of society, crying out against you as the disturbers of the public peace and the sappers of the public virtue.

Such facts cannot fail to set us thinking. It is not in ordinary human nature to be continually meeting this Jesus of Nazareth identified with so many familiar things, and not have its interest and curiosity keenly aroused. Inevitably we are led to ask, "Whose son is he?" Who a man's parents were, makes ordinarily very little difference to us. We gauge the man according to his own ability and efficiency, without reference to his origin. Our estimate of Shakespeare or of Bacon is no greater because we know their ancestry. But the case is otherwise with Christ. His practical relation to the world is bound up with his origin. His life suggests and his words lay claim to a superhuman lineage; and it bears very directly upon the living and thinking of all of us, whether he be indeed born Lord of men and angels, coequal with God, or whether he be no more than a man like unto ourselves. It makes the difference between worship and admiration; between allegiance and partial ad-



herence ; between implicit trust and critical discrimination ; between passionate enthusiasm and cool respect.

So it behooves us to press the question in this direction : “What think ye of Christ ? Is He the son of God or not ?”

The more so because there is often visible a tendency to put aside the question as of little practical moment. It is said the question of Christ’s divinity belongs to the region of metaphysics, and does not affect the acceptance of his precepts as a rule of life.

But the truth is that if Christianity be accepted as a fact, and still more if it be accepted as a rule, those who so accept it cannot stop here, for the fact gets its main significance and the rule its obligation from what Christ is. Christianity cannot be accepted as a mere system, since the system is framed to set forth and to exalt its author. The system is Christ. Christ alone interprets it ; and therefore the whole question of its value to the world turns on the nature of Christ’s person. Here comes a teacher claiming to be equal with God, and defending, instead of surrendering, his position when the Jews threaten to stone him for blasphemy ; one who claims power to forgive sins ; one who claims pre-existence with God ; one who asserts that he is to judge the world, and to do this with the special intent that men may honor him as they honor God. I hesitate not to say that such claims bring us face to face with a single sharply-cut alternative—deity or imposture. I hesitate not to say that if the Christ of the gospels is the

being whom Renan, for example, decorates with the title of "a pillar of humanity," he is the fitting object for the world's contempt and not for its love and reverence. What think ye of Christ? Is he the Son of God, or a conscious and deliberate impostor? We must answer this question ere we commit ourselves to Christianity.

So, too, if Jesus is not sinless, I may admire him, like other men of genius; but I cannot accept a moral system at his hands, much less a professed atonement for my sins based on his perfect obedience and the offering of his spotless nature to God. If he be not coequal with the Father, I may even reverence, but I must not worship him. If he was but a good man, a brilliant teacher, I may study and copy; but I need not look up into the heavens expecting to see a Great High Priest, touched with the feeling of my infirmities through his human nature, and lifting me above them by his divine power. According as I answer the question to myself, whether he be the Son of God or no, he is either a mere memory, growing fainter with the lapse of time, or a living power and presence, growing dearer and sweeter and mightier in his influence over my life, the nearer the years bring me to his eternal presence. As an earnest truth-seeker, as a lost sinner, as a sufferer, as an heir of immortality, the question is one of tremendous import to me—"Whose Son is Christ?"

But the gospel never encourages mere speculative thinking. Whenever it asks, "What think ye?" we may be sure it is marshalling us along some line of

practical duty. So our views of Christ's person and character bear directly upon what we are and upon our line of conduct. Opposite views of Christ will not conduct us to the same point. If one approaches from the left hand, and the other from the right, they will find, if the gospel is to be believed, a very great difference between the place at Christ's right hand and that at his left. If you think Christ is the Son of God, you are logically committed to follow Christ. If you answer Christ's question, "Whom say ye that I am," with Peter's words, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," he follows it promptly up with that other question to Peter, "Lovest thou me?" I do not assume that Christ is what he claims to be; only that if you are satisfied that he is, you are committed to a passionate devotion. You have acknowledged a Master whose rule is love, with whom love is the very basis of loyalty; you have acknowledged him to be coequal with God, and he turns upon you with God's own law of love. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." Face this practical side of the question and tell me, "What think ye of Christ?" I do not say that Christ has any authority to call you a sinner, or to forgive sins; only that if you think Christ is the Son of God, the conclusion is very damaging to your self-righteousness. It is a conclusion which is adapted to bring tears of penitence to your eyes, and words of confession to your lips. It is bound up with the story of a lonely sufferer in Gethsemane, of an up-

lifted cross, of a pierced side, and it points to the foot of that cross as your appropriate place, and to that bleeding victim as your offering for sin. And standing to-day in view of that cross, on the very threshold of the chamber where Jesus is to be again lifted up in symbol before the eyes of his church, I ask once more, "What think ye of Christ?"

I do not assume that Jesus is the Master he claims to be. Perhaps others have an equal or a superior claim to masterdom. Perhaps the words of some Hindu saint, some Greek philosopher, some modern transcendentalist come home to you with more authority than the words of the man of Nazareth. But if you grant that Jesus is the Son of God, you are committed to service. There is a yoke and a burden for you. There are talents, one, five, ten, awaiting your administration. There is a lesson of fidelity for you, a living lesson, running through those wondrous three years of a ministry, whose key-note was, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work." If Christ be the Son of God, the lesson of this ministry is bound to be your rule of living. Service is to be the very staple of your life; fidelity your highest aim. Christ is to rule your life absolutely; is to choose your place for you, to mete out your work to you, to apportion your time as He will, to command your means for his own uses, to be supreme in your business and in your home. Oh, let your thought steal away this morning from this busy century, with its pushing and wrangling for place and pelf. Go back, far back into the olden time, and

mount to that upper chamber in old Jerusalem, and look upon that kneeling figure, girded with a towel, that head so soon to bear again the flashing diadem of the Father's glory, bent over the wayworn feet of the fisherman and publican, and with that picture in your eye, and in your ear those meaning words, “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many;” tell me, “What think ye of Christ?”

And now I change my ground. I make no more concessions for argument's sake. I take the standpoint of one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God; and if there is one here who rejects Christ, if there is one here who deems it a matter of little consequence what he thinks about Christ, if there is one here who professes to believe in Christ without following Christ, to such an one I address myself. I have shown you, and you needed no words of mine to show you, that Christ is a fact and a power in the world, and has been such since the day of his death. To attempt to ignore this fact, thrusting itself under a thousand forms daily, into our very faces, argues anything but wisdom. Men may honestly differ as to the solution of the problem furnished by Christ's life and lessons, but solved it must be. No thoughtful man can evade it. In the eloquent words of a modern apologist, “Though you only salute your Saviour with the Pagan cry, ‘Behold the man!’ at least you cannot ignore him; you cannot resist the moral and intellectual forces which converge in our day with an ever-increasing intensity upon his sacred person;

you cannot turn a deaf ear to the question which he asks of his followers in each generation, and which he never asked more solemnly than now: 'Whom say men that I, the Son of man, am?'"<sup>1</sup>

And from my point of view, I maintain that it makes an enormous practical difference what answer you give to this question. It may matter little what you think about some things, but it cannot matter little what you think about Christ. Christ declares himself to be the Son of God. The whole Scriptures indorse his claim. His words and his works leave it beyond question; and being the Son of God, the equal of God, one with God, the manifestation of God, the only medium of knowing or approaching God—the acceptance or rejection of Christ is the acceptance or rejection of God. You may choose some other mode of deliverance from sin, but you will find it is not strong enough to break your chains. You may choose some other type of manhood as your model, but you will achieve only an inferior manhood. You may adopt some other theory of life than Christ's theory of service, but your life will be a failure. In short, and I would have you weigh these words well, what you think of Christ determines your moral destiny.

The matter is open to you now. You are left to form your opinion. The evidence is before you to weigh it calmly. Christ is before you in the gospels, in history, in daily life, suggesting constantly the

---

<sup>1</sup> Liddon.



question, “What think ye of Christ?” As an intelligent man or woman, as an honest man or woman, as an immortal soul, you cannot, you must not shirk the question. For depend upon it, if you choose not to think of him at all, or any more than you are absolutely forced to do; if you resolutely shut your eyes to him, the day is coming when every eye shall see him; when he shall stand clearly revealed as your judge; when there shall no longer be any room for question as to his lineage or dignity, and when the great question forcing itself upon your heart, and shaking it with fear to its inmost core, will be no longer, “What think you of Christ?” but, “What does Christ think of me?” No longer “What shall I do with Jesus?” but, “What will Jesus do with me?”

It is well that we may come to the Lord's table to-day. A fitting place it is to ask ourselves once more, “What think ye of Christ?” No better place to win the strength and courage for the work and warfare which awaits us. You say much by coming to this table with its broken bread, symbol of the wheat crushed for the world's hunger; with its outpoured wine telling of a life freely given as a ransom for many. You say you accept the portion of the bruised wheat; are ready to be broken, if Christ can so use you best for the world's weal. You say you choose not the life which hides and seals itself within its own carefully dug wells; but the life which freely flows abroad in the multiplied channels of ministry. You say that even though a part with Christ carries with it sorrow and sacrifice, you take Christ's part never-

theless. Be it so. Come to the feast ; but better than even here shall you give the answer to the question, "What think ye of Christ," by the way in which you shall take up the real, no less than the symbolic cross ; by bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifest in you. So may God help you to answer this question to the world, that, seeing that the thought of Christ is more than an opinion, rather a daily, living power in you, they may, through the servant, be drawn to his Lord.



THE WARDSHIP OF THE  
LAW.

GALATIANS III.

- (24) Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

## IV.

### THE WARDSHIP OF THE LAW.

THE transfiguration vision set forth the fact that the law and the prophets, represented on the mountain by Moses and Elias, had given place to Christ. Those two appeared there, paying homage to our Lord ; and by this, no less than by the voice which came out of the cloud, declaring that Christ was the anointed of God, the men who were to preach the gospel were distinctly told that the day of Moses and Elias was past, the dispensation of ceremonies and of shadows at an end, and that Jesus was henceforth to be the theme of their preaching and the central figure in the eyes of the church and of the world.

Yet while Christ thus intended to exalt himself above Moses and Elias, his gospel above the law and the prophets, he by no means meant that the disciples should hold these in contempt. On the contrary, Christ everywhere endeavors to show his followers that the law and the prophets and the gospel were parts of one great scheme by which God was instructing and saving the world. And nowhere does this appear more clearly than in that very "sermon on the mount," by which superficial readers seek to disparage the teachings of the Old Testament. No decla-

ration could be more explicit than this: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you" (a formula with which the Saviour always prefaces any specially weighty saying), "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Hence we see in this, as in so many other instances, the necessity of studying the Scriptures entire. Not only must we look back and see how the law and the prophets lead up to Christ and prepare the way for him, but we must also look forward and see how this connection between the law and the gospel is explained and illustrated in the writings of the Apostles. There are those who say that they are quite satisfied with the gospels—the words of Christ—and who treat Paul, for instance, as though he were an intruder; as though his writings in some way detracted from the purity and simplicity of the gospel, and were quite superfluous. Such forget that our Lord himself declared that his own teachings were germinal, and would require and would receive further illustration in the future; and they forget also that Paul was instinct with the very spirit of Christ, and was divinely declared to be a "chosen vessel" to proclaim His name. And no one, I think, can

study the writings of Paul, of John, or of Peter, without seeing, not only that they do not contradict Christ, but also that they reflect much light upon the teachings of Christ.

Take our text, for instance. It might stand as a parallel to the declaration of our Lord: "I am not come to destroy but to fulfil the law and the prophets," and also to the lesson on the mount of transfiguration. In that formal resignation of their position and honors to Jesus, Moses and Elijah only did what they had been appointed from the first to do. From the very beginning their mission had pointed to Jesus, and their work had been to lead the world forward on the road to Christ.

That is just what this text declares concerning the law. It was not a thing independent of the gospel. It meant the gospel. It was the gospel on its lower side. It issued in the gospel, and could find its true fulfilment only in the gospel.

Hence, our text says the law was our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ.

Here we have one of those graphic picture lessons in which the writings of Paul abound, and which show how deeply he had studied the illustrative teaching of his master Christ. The original of the picture might be seen in any respectable Greek or Roman family.

Somewhere about a boy's sixth year, he was taken from the care of his mother, and of the female slaves, and entrusted to a male slave, known as the "*pedagogue*." This person was often a foreigner, often a

person of education and culture, and sometimes a man of distinction in his own country. But we must not be misled by the word "schoolmaster" in our version, which is all that we commonly understand by the term pedagogue. Teaching, indeed, was not the main part of his office, though he sometimes had a share in that work ; nor was the formation of morals. These things were entrusted principally to others. The pedagogue's business was that of general supervision. He accompanied the boy to school, he carried his books, he attended him to the gymnasium, he assisted him in preparing his tasks, he seems to have had, in some cases, authority to punish his faults. He was, in short, a kind of nurse.

Now, Paul uses this figure to represent the relation of the law to the gospel. The law, he says, was to the spiritual education of the world, just what the pedagogue was to the boy. Before the boy could enter upon the freedom of manhood, he must be under this tutor. He must be, in a certain sense, in bondage ; under specific rules. His intercourse with his father must be largely through the medium of the tutor, and not free and direct. Just so, Paul says, God's purpose toward His people was to bring them into the liberty of His own children, to make them free men in His own household ; but to this there was necessary a preparatory stage of legal discipline. "Before faith came," he says, "we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed. Wherefore, the law was our pedagogue to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by

faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a pedagogue."

Thus, then, instead of finding the law depreciated by the gospel, we find it exalted. We are told that it played a most important part in our Christian education; that it had a sublime purpose; that it was nothing less than the instrument in bringing us to that Christian liberty which we most highly prize; to that life of faith in Jesus Christ, of free intercourse with our Heavenly Father; to that freedom in the form and outworking of our individual, spiritual life, which belongs only to the sons of God.

But the question now arises, "What becomes of the law, now that we are brought to Christ?" Is it a dead letter? Has it no more part to play in our religious life? Does the life of faith and of love do away with the life of law?

Here we strike into the track of our Saviour's own teaching, to which I have already referred in His words—"Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." Here, then, we must try to possess ourselves of some of those great fundamental truths which underlie the relation of the law to the gospel, and in stating these, I go no further than Christ's own statements.

The first truth we are to bear in mind is, that **THE WHOLE LAW OF GOD IS ONE.** God's law is the declaration of His will; and God's perfect will never changes, and, therefore, God's law is like Himself—the same yesterday, to-day, and forever; or, as the



Psalmist says, "All His commandments are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness." So that it is essentially impossible that one part of God's law should ever contradict any other part, or that the whole law as revealed in the Levitical Code, the Psalms, the Prophets, the Gospels, and Epistles, should be other than one. At the same time it is true that this law may develop itself by successive stages, and that it may manifest itself in different ways in these different stages. The best illustration of this is found in a tree. Under ground, among the rocks, among the subterranean springs, the tree develops in the form of roots. Above ground we find the tree developing in the form of trunk. We go higher, and our tree is branches, and then leaves, and blossoms and fruit. The tree is one. Fruit and roots are the extremes of one perfect organism; yet what a difference between the juicy fruit, swinging in the fresh air and clear sunlight, and the clammy, tough, dirty roots in the depths of the mould. Just so God's law is one law, whether we see it in its lower or in its higher stage. Love and law are not distinct growths. On the contrary, we are told that love is the fulfilling of the law. All that is essential to law remains in love. They are not disjoined any more than the root and the fruit are disjoined in the tree; on the contrary, law runs up into love, and law is never seen at its best and highest until it is seen fulfilled in one word: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself."



Now, Paul says the law brought us to Christ ; but when we get to Christ, we do not find that we are done with the law. On the contrary, we find Christ standing for the integrity of the law. "Not a jot or tittle shall pass away till all be fulfilled. I came to fulfil the law." And yet, we find scattered through the New Testament words like these : "Ye are not under the law, but under grace." "Having abolished in his flesh the law of commandments contained in ordinances," and others to the same effect. Are Paul and Christ then at variance ? Are we, in one part of Scripture, told that we are still under the law, and in another that we are no longer under the law ?

There is no contradiction, but rather perfect harmony. And here we reach our second general truth which you have already anticipated, namely, that WE ARE TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE SUBSTANCE AND THE FORM OF THE LAW ; between the divine *thought*, the divine, eternal, binding *truth*, which is the essence of the law, and the mere formal *precept* or *symbol* by which it was conveyed. As we have seen that God's law was revealed to men through successive stages, in ways suitable to their grade of intelligence or of moral development, so it is not difficult to conceive that the law might, at a later stage, drop off from itself much which belonged to an earlier stage, and yet remain essentially the same, unchanged and unchangeable law ; just as the tree drops off in the branches the mould which clings about the roots, and drops off in the blossom and fruit the bark of

the trunk and branches, while root and trunk and branch and blossom yet continue to be one tree.

And so we see that it was. The law, for example, contained the great principle of satisfaction. Sin must be atoned for. The form under which the Mosaic law taught and enforced that truth, was that of animal sacrifices. The Levitical altars flowed with the blood of bulls and of goats offered in sacrifice for sin. Now when Christ came, he did away with all this; but did he do away with the law of sacrifice for sin? Nay, he set the eternal seal of God on that law, by offering himself a sacrifice. Not one jot or one tittle passed from the law that sin must be atoned for. Only the earlier form and mode of expressing and working out the law passed away. And hence, says the writer to the Hebrews, "For the law, having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. . . . It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. . . . In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I (Christ), Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do Thy will, O God. . . . He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second;" taketh away the shadow that he may give the substance; does not take away the law of sacrifice for sin, but fulfils that very law, by the offering of himself, and makes it as binding upon a penitent sinner as ever it was in Moses' day, that he should bring to

God an offering for his sin, even the body of Jesus Christ offered once for all.

Or, take the numerous sanitary provisions of the Levitical law, so necessarily minute and specific for a people so long enslaved and ignorant of the most ordinary laws of decency. No Christian thinks of carrying out these precepts now; and yet the truth which underlay all those precepts, the broad general obligation they conveyed, was not at all impaired by Christ. It stands to-day, a law for the Christian just as much as for the Israelite at the foot of Sinai—that the body is the temple of God, and that he who wilfully neglects or abuses it sins against God. “What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” The very fact which marks the transition from the old dispensation to the new, the death of Jesus Christ for the world, is used to emphasize this old physical law. “Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body.”

See how this fact is carried out in Christ’s fulfilment of the law. The old Mosaic law was separative. In order to carry out His purpose of making a peculiar, chosen people, God found it necessary to begin with physical separation. They were not ready for the higher development of that idea—the separation in spirit and character from the men of the world. God desired to fasten in their minds the thought that they were a people set apart to His service. So He

began by separating them from the nations about them, and forbidding their intercourse and intermarriage with the heathen. When Christ came, he found that the people had not gotten beyond this lower phase of the idea of separation. The great thing with them was not to violate the letter of the old law ; not to eat with publicans and sinners. You remember that, after Christ's ascension, Peter was rebuked for eating with the family of the gentile Cornelius. And so little was the essence of that law of separation appreciated, so far were the very leaders of the Jews from being morally purer than those with whom they refused intercourse, that our Lord said to the priests and elders : "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Christ was continually shocking the legalists by seeming to break that law. "He eateth with publicans and sinners" was one of the stock charges against him. And yet he did not break the law, and he meant that no Christian should ever break it in the real essence of its meaning, which he taught the world by being himself, and commanding his disciples to be "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners ;" and Paul, therefore, merely gives us the spirit of the old law of separation when he says : "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed *by the renewing of your mind.*"

There, again, was the Sabbath. In nothing did Christ so shock and exasperate the teachers of the law as by his behavior on that day ; and yet he did not destroy the law ; he fulfilled it, and set a far higher character upon it than it had in the popular

conception. He observed it as a day of worship, of rest, of cheerful festivity, and not by refusing to help the lame or the blind, or to pluck the ears to satisfy his hunger, nor by re preaching the puerilities of the Rabbis about putting out a lamp kindled before the Sabbath, or preventing the dropping of oil in a press, or forbidding the sick to send for a physician, or a tailor to go out with his needle on Friday night, lest he should forget it and break the Sabbath by carrying it about.

And not only so, but instead of letting down the claims of the law Christ showed men that it reached far deeper than they had thought, and told them that unless their righteousness should exceed that of those who were their highest examples of legal strictness—the Scribes and Pharisees—they should not enter into the kingdom of heaven. To take a single instance, there was the law of murder. The strictest Jew never thought that it reached beyond the taking of human life. He might hate his enemy as intensely as he pleased, and so long as he kept his hands unstained with his blood he was guiltless. What must have been his surprise when he heard this Jesus, whom he was wont to look upon with disgust and horror, as a breaker of Moses' law, saying: "The law means more, not less than you think. Think you only he who kills is in danger of the judgment? I say unto you that anger and hatred are the roots of murder, and are of one piece with it, and whosoever is angry with his brother, without a cause, shall be in danger of judgment."

With these two truths clearly before us, namely, that God's law is one, and that its interpretation may broaden, and its letter and form disappear with the progress of the race, while its substance and essence remain unchanged, we are, I think, prepared to see that our pedagogue, the law, brings us to Christ in its own interest, for its own higher, broader, deeper, more spiritual interpretation. We are not done with law when we get to Christ, any more than the Roman boy was done with obligation and obedience to his father when he passed from under the pedagogue's care. Paul's very figure teaches us that, if we study it ; for you know that, according to the Roman law, a father's dominion over his son remained absolute, even after he came of age. Parental affection indeed might allow him the largest liberty ; but according to the law he might exert his authority over him. The son might be a magistrate or a triumphant general, but the father could chastise him with stripes, put him in prison, sell him into slavery, or take his life, and the law would justify him.

So Paul's picture tells us that the law, in bringing us to Christ, while it leads us into the liberty of sons, does not relieve us from the obligation of sons. God is still our Father ; Christ himself teaches us to address him thus ; a father, who, in giving us the liberty of dear children, none the less says : "If ye love me, keep my commandments." And therefore Paul says, in this same letter : "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty : only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For



all the law is fulfilled in one word." Even love refuses to separate itself from law. The liberty of sonship refuses to be divorced from law, for you remember that James says that the man shall be blessed in his deed who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues therein, being a doer of the work.

And yet, you can understand how a man may live under law, and the same law, too, which shaped his childish life, and yet live a man's life, a free, broad, generous life, as different from the life of childhood, as a blossom is from a root. Here is a boy, for instance, who begins to study mathematics. The teacher gives him specific rules. "Do thus, and you will add numbers. Do so, and you will subtract or multiply." It is not a matter of principles or laws at all. The boy has, and can have, no conception of the great fundamental laws of numbers and of their relations. He takes his arithmetic and studies the rule for decimals or long division, and does his sums by the process laid down in the rule. But one day, the boy comes to the teacher with his sum worked out by a process not laid down in his arithmetic. He has thought it out by a process of his own. The rules he has been practising have led him unconsciously up to certain great mathematical principles which are not confined in their working out to the one little rule of the arithmetic, but are capable of a variety of expressions. Is the teacher angry because the sum was not done by the rule? Is he not rather delighted? He sees, in the lad's overstepping the rule, the very result at which he has been aiming. All the rules were di-

rected to bring about this grasp of principles which he has obtained. Henceforth, he will not be bound by the rules, but will he therefore violate the great laws of mathematics? Will he not be as much under law as ever, yea, under the same law, when he measures the orbits of planets or weighs suns, as when he repeated the multiplication table, or cast up the little columns in simple addition?

So it is in moral development. You want to teach a child the great principle of order. You begin with specific rules. "You must put your books in such a place, and your hat in such a place. You must study such and such hours. You may amuse yourself at such times." The time finally comes when all these rules drop off of themselves. They are no longer needed. He has gotten hold of the great truth of order, and its obligation has its grip upon him, and that was all that the rules were intended for. That being reached, he may be orderly and systematic in his own way. The great point is that, however his way may differ from that prescribed by his old rules, he is still under law, and under the same law—the law of order.

So then, when God's law, the pedagogue, the law of commandments, precepts, prohibitions, hands a man over to Christ, it introduces him to a life which is just as much under the power of law and of the same law as ever. Law is not abolished, but whereas formerly the law was applied to the man from without, it now begins to work from within the man. In other words, he lives by the law of God written upon



his conscience and wrought into his life. He is a law unto himself. He is no longer a moral schoolboy, but a man in Christ Jesus. The law of precepts has been silently preparing the man to be kindled and quickened into life by contact with Christ's life. You know how, at the sacred season in Rome, the workmen are engaged for days in arranging the lines of lamps over the dome and portico of St. Peter's; and when at last the hour strikes, on a sudden the whole gigantic structure bursts into flame. Just so law draws the lines of obedience and duty; but these, however symmetrical and sharp, are dead and cold until they feel Christ's touch; then the life kindles and glows. The lines of law are all irradiated.

But, remember, this comes only in the full and free surrender of the life to Christ. That surrender is faith, and the law brings us to Christ that we may be justified by faith. When a man gives himself up in faith to Christ, accepts his offer to make good his offences against the law, opens his heart to the full power of Christ's character and example, gives himself up to the grand enthusiasm of love for Christ, then and only then he is in right relations both to Christ and to the law. Then he is justified; then he moves in harmony with God and with God's law and order; then he fulfils the law under the impulse of love, and walks in loving obedience, yet with the freedom of a child at home.

We see, then, that we have lighted upon no strange or arbitrary fact. We see that it is the tendency of precepts and rules everywhere to expand into some-

thing larger than themselves, and that God's law of commandments contained in ordinances is no exception, but leads up to Christ, and to that broad, free, generous life, which only faith in Christ, and love for Christ will enable us to live. But this truth bears with especial force upon those whose lives are guided merely by moral precept. You say you are a moralist. God forbid I should quarrel with morality. You say you try to live by God's law; that you study His precepts and try to keep them. All well. But I take your own ground. I stand beside you on the law, and I ask—*How far does the law lead you?* Let me remind you of that good centurion Cornelius—a moral man, yea, a devout moralist; yea, more, told by an angel from heaven that his good deeds had been pleasing to God. And yet he was told that there was another step yet to be taken, and that he would find out what it was by sending for Christ's apostle. When Peter came he told him that needful thing was faith in Christ. So I say to you as a lover of the law, as a man who professes to stand by the law, as one who praises the "sermon on the mount," the law carries Christ with it. The law was not framed to be an end unto itself, but the law was to bring us to Christ. Take away Christ, and the law is meaningless; and therefore I say that, as a mere moralist, you are only on the first stage of the law. You have not carried out the law to its full development; if you had, it would have brought you to Christ inevitably. Let me urge that point. As a legalist you are committed to Christ; by the very terms of the law

you must come to Christ; as a professed lover and keeper of the law you are committed to faith in Christ, for Christ is the end of the law, and the law was our pedagogue to bring us to Christ. And you cannot say that if Christ be proven to be a myth, and faith in Christ a fond delusion, you can fall back on the law. No, the law means Christ, and Christ and the law stand or fall together. I stand with you in your admiration of the "sermon on the mount." You tell me law is emphasized there by Christ himself; but do you not hear Christ say, "The fulfilment of the law is in *me*?" Is not Christ saying just what Paul does, that the law was to lead us to Christ? But you say, there is nothing there about atonement, about a redeemer. No, not in words; but try you, my friend, to keep that law in the "sermon on the mount," to keep it in its deep sense, as a law not only of outward action, but of spiritual condition, and I am mistaken if you shall have gone far in your task without breaking helplessly down, and finding that the work can be done only through the indwelling of the new life, the life of faith in Christ the redeemer. So it will be just as Paul says: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." May Christ shed His own light upon the law, and may the law, which you reverence, lead you to its legitimate end—a perfect man in Christ.



SONSHIP BY RECEIVING  
CHRIST.

JOHN I.

(12) But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

## V.

### SONSHIP BY RECEIVING CHRIST.

To be a son of God! I wonder if we realize all that is contained in that phrase. Years ago, this whole nation was stirred to admiration and homage by the visit of a mere boy, not remarkable in himself, but the son of the Queen of Great Britain. How many thousands envied his lot. Yet such sonship is insignificant compared with this which our text presents—to be a son of the King of kings and Lord of lords. The origin of this sonship is the highest conceivable. The mould in which it is cast is divine; for whom God called as sons, He tells us, He predestined to be conformed to the image of His only begotten Son, that he might be the first-born of a glorious train of brethren. Its destiny—can we believe it?—is to share the glory of Christ in glory; for if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, that we may be glorified together. Men's ideas of a son of God are often strangely meagre. Even Christian men sometimes fall into the way of regarding him as a starveling, picked up out of vagabondage and misery by God's kindness, and just kept out of perdition by a special stretch of God's mercy. That is not the scale on which God does a work which

commenced with the princely gift of Jesus Christ. The work is carried through on the same scale ; and being made a new creature in Christ Jesus, means not only forgiveness of sins, but “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” That is the best Paul can do to express it. “Whom He justified, them He also glorified.”

A large part of the world is indifferent to this whole matter ; but in every age there are those to whom it is the chief question : seekers after God asking, “How shall we become God’s children ?”

The text gives to all who thus seek, a plain answer. It is speaking of society at the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was indifferent to Him. “The light shone in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.” But there were some who did become sons of God ; some who were put in possession of that secret after which so many sincere souls in all ages had been feeling. They were those and those only who *received* Him. To *them* gave He power to become sons of God.

As many as received Him. My sermon is mainly on this word “received.” The statement of the text is that, to become a son of God, is to receive God in Christ Jesus.

That seems simple enough, and yet I am mistaken if some of you do not find yourselves fighting away from it before we leave it. Indeed the very trouble is, that it is altogether too simple to not a few minds. It seems such a puerile way of reaching so great a



result. In a transaction between giver and receiver, the receiver always makes the smaller figure, and men do not like to make a small figure in their moral struggles, any more than in their business or in their warfare. They want results associated with some heroism, some deserving effort which shall throw them into prominence. And it is just at this point that the gospel economy makes an issue. Where men emphasize doing, it emphasizes receiving. All the old economies are in a ferment of temple-building, sacrificing, pouring out of purchase-money, consulting oracles, going on pilgrimages, in order to win this blessing of divine sonship. The receiving is to come after all this; after the sacrifice has bled, the treasury been drained, and the penance undergone. In the new Christian order, receiving comes first. Man does not become a son after he has painfully worked his way up to God. He has no power to work up. He must receive it from God to begin with. He becomes a son, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God," and by receiving God. "To as many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God."

Some one will perhaps say: "Is not this the doctrine of faith without works?" It is astonishing how fearful many people are that Christ will not give them enough to do. But so far as Christ's gospel is concerned they have no cause to be uneasy on that point. In whatever the Bible may be supposed to be defective as a manual of living, it never fails to keep a man

busy. No other book presents such objects of effort ; no other kindles such impulses to work ; no other so urges and emphasizes work. Work is not turned out of doors when Christ comes in as master of the house. It is only put in its right place. It is dethroned as the *instrument* of the new birth and life in Christ ; it is exalted as the *fruit* of that new life. Doing does not make men sons of God, but true sons of God are the most active of men. Christian life is made up of faith and works, as man is of soul and body ; but faith comes first in that life, and expresses itself in works. The people asked Christ, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" Our Lord replied : "This is the work of God, that ye *believe* on Him whom He hath sent." Here John is not discussing the matter of works at all. Men are out of their right relation to God ; are not sons but prodigals, and he is telling them how to get back and become sons ; and he says that, in the establishment of this right relation, man must take the position of a receiver : only as he receives God in Christ can he become a son of God.

Let us inquire whether, in the light of ordinary laws, this is a strange or an isolated fact.

We hear and talk a great deal about the wonderful achievements of men. We flatter ourselves that our own doing is largely concerned with what we attain ; and yet, when we get back to the fundamental conditions of success, we find that they are, without exception, *gifts*, and that our success, after all, is based on what we have received. Our very existence was a

gift to begin with. You are a prosperous man to-day. You own houses and lands ; or you are a power in law or in medicine ; and you say you are a self-made man. You had no advantages of birth or of patronage. You just worked your own way up. My dear friend, you are quite mistaken. The first essentials of your success you received ; your reason, your sight, your hearing, your health, what had you to do with those ? Then there were ten thousand facts and influences in your time, in the civilization in which you lived, which were the fruits of all the experience of the past, which prepared the way and the conditions of your success, and which you simply received as matters of course. There were moral influences which you breathed in with the atmosphere of your childhood—floating round you in your home, and in the society about you, and in the spirit of your age ; and you received from these a basis ready made, on which you climbed to your present prosperity. To take a single instance : you, as a successful, educated man, are the product of a Christian civilization. You did not help to make it. You found it made for you. You only received it. Is there not a familiar, every-day truth as well as a spiritual truth in our Lord's words ? "I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor. Other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors."

And indeed, do we not utter this truth, even though we do not recognize it, in our common speech ? When we speak of a man of genius, the peculiar range and quality of whose power other men cannot

win by study and labor, who is born on a higher plane than other men, do we not say that such a man is endowed, or, to use the popular word, "gifted?"

You can supply for yourselves abundant illustrations in the same line, all going to prove that when we meet this truth in the spiritual region, we have no right to be startled as by an isolated or an arbitrary fact. The fact is only a counterpart of what we see here; that the very beginnings and foundations of man's life and success are in what he receives—in that which is done for him and on him. If his natural existence is a gift, why should his spiritual life be any less a gift? If the essential conditions of his happiness and prosperity and usefulness as a son and as a citizen are furnished him and received by him in the one case, why not in the other?

And as you study the successive stages of the life of a son of God, you find him at each stage in the attitude of a receiver. Before he becomes a son of God, he is, if the Bible is to be believed, at enmity with God. His heart is set upon his own ends, and not on doing God's will. Now, if there arise in him any better sentiment, any desire for God, any distaste for his sinful life, these are not produced by his own will. They do not grow up naturally in his own heart; they are the work of the Holy Spirit of God, drawing him to God. The very impulse to become a son of God comes to him from outside himself, and is received by him. Suppose you take a child into your household. He has been under the care of those who have taught him to hate you. He has

been made to believe that you are harsh, cruel, arbitrary ; that your home is a gloomy place ; and he comes into your house reluctantly, and keeps away from you as much as possible, and is cold and reserved, morose and rebellious. But you surround him with an atmosphere of love. You speak to him kindly. You give him many privileges. By and by a change comes over his feelings. He begins to desire to know you better ; his reserve melts away, he seeks your society, and finally comes to you and confesses his error, and gives himself up to you with a child's abandonment of affection. I ask, whence came the impulse to this change of feeling ? It was not self-generated. It came from you. It was created by your affection shown to him. The attraction over him was exerted by your character. Is not this just what John says : "We love Him because He first loved us ?" Is it strange, as we come to know something of the hardness and wilfulness of the human heart, that Christ said, "No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him ?" So, then, in the very first movement of a sinful man's desire toward God, he is a receiver. The impulse comes from God.

Go on a step farther, to repentance. Is that a matter of one's will ? "Perhaps," says Coleridge, "the repentance required in Scripture, the passing into a new and contrary principle of action, is in the sinner's own power, at his own liking. He has but to open his eyes to the sin, and the tears are close at hand to wash it away. Verily the tenet of transub-

stantiation is scarcely at greater variance with the common-sense and experience of mankind, or borders more closely on a contradiction in terms, than this self-change." Ah, no. You cannot repent at will. The change of mind, the changed principle of life, must be received in receiving God to melt with the Spirit's breath the ice about your heart; to break as with hammer and fire its flintiness. Men do not comprehend the nature of repentance when they think they can repent at will. Too often it is represented to them by a transient emotion; by a temporary disgust at a sin with which they are surfeited, or by a few sentimental tears over an inane life of which they are tired for the time. If they did but know repentance as it is, as the cleaving the life down to its very base, breaking it up, running it into a new mould, they would understand why God Himself undertakes to superintend that work, and says, "*I will take away the heart of stone out of your flesh.*"

Or, go on still farther to faith. Can men believe what they will, and when they will? If you have ever dealt much with them in their moral and religious struggles, you will have no difficulty in answering that question. You will recall instances where men have been solemnly, painfully in earnest to arrive at intellectual conviction of the truth, and yet could not believe; when they have shown that it was possible for the mind, otherwise clear and well balanced, to become absolutely incapable of justly weighing religious truth. All the reasoning in the world, desire to believe, determination to believe, will not do away



with this impotence of the believing faculty. And when it comes to the deeper work of faith, the believing with the heart, the resting of the whole self upon Christ crucified, the work exceeds all nature's power. The very ability thus to believe must be received in answer to the prayer: "Lord, help thou mine unbelief."

Just as in the case of repentance, men are misled by underestimating the difficulties of faith. Possibly it is an easy thing to believe, as too many do, with the top of the mind, if I may so speak, with a faith which grasps at straws, and cleaves chiefly to what it desires to believe, and is easily shifted by a new hearsay or a new fascination. But faith, on which a man stakes his soul, his life, his immortality, is not something which the mere beck of his will can command at any time, or which merely plays upon the surface of his moral nature. "*With the heart* man believeth unto righteousness." The faith by which he lays fame, fortune, ambition, will, at Christ's feet, and accepts him as master, saviour, teacher, comforter, surety for time and for eternity, is the gift of God. Receiving God he then first receives power to believe.

And this idea of receiving enters far more than we commonly think into what we conceive as the active side of Christian life. For instance, this matter of sacrifice, devotion, self-consecration. Somehow, too much of our own effort gets into it, so that it becomes pervaded with a busy self-consciousness. We mean it for self-consecration, but sometimes there is more self than consecration. We bring the sacrifice and

lay it upon the altar, but the bringing assumes too much importance. A man is very apt to begin a Christian life with the question, "Now, what must I give up? My becoming a son of God must begin in an act of sacrifice. So here I put into a heap my pleasures, my ambitions, my indulgences, and, with much tugging and straining, with many qualms of the rebellious flesh, I drag them to the altar. This pile once consumed, I may expect God to come and own me as His child." Ah, my friend, you have gotten hold of this matter on the wrong side. There is, indeed, no question that your sinful indulgences must be surrendered, your whole self presented a living sacrifice; but think you this is accomplished in saying, "Here, Lord, I give myself away?" Nay; self-consecration is the *crowning* act of Christian life, not the *introductory* act. It is the grand, final result of years of Christian experience. Do not misunderstand me. I recognize what is called consecration at the beginning of Christian life, the forsaking all, and going after Christ. But forsaking the world is only the beginning of consecration. Leaving all for Christ is one thing; becoming like Christ is another thing. Consecration is more than renunciation. Consecration is being all God's: having the life so merged in Christ, that the man can say, "Not I live, but Christ liveth in me:" when the life is not merely given to God, but pervaded with God. This is not at the beginning, but far on toward the end of the course. Paul gives us the truth in the Epistle to the Philip-pians. He had suffered the loss of all things. That



was behind him. Before him lay this: "That I may win Christ, be found in Him, having His righteousness, and know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings." And then he says, "Not as if I had already attained, but I follow after." Thus, I say, we are to recognize a distinction between consecration as an act of the will, and consecration as a consummated fact. The former marks the entrance on Christian life, the latter is its ripe result. Between the two is the long, hard struggle to make the act of the will a fact of experience: the "following after" of which Paul speaks. Now, I have said that our self-consecration often has too much self in it; carries with it too much the sense of our doing; whereas consecration, from its beginning in the act of the renewed will to its consummation in the merging of the life in Christ, comes through our receiving God in Christ. That is the side of it which we ought to push forward. We say, "we will consecrate self, and then and therefore receive God." God says you cannot consecrate self without first receiving Him. You say, "I will sweep and garnish the house, and God shall come into the place which I have cleared for Him." God says you cannot clear the place without Him. The amount of it is, all God asks of you is to receive Him. He will make His own place. You want to be a consecrated man or woman; receive Christ and He will teach you how. You want strength to make the first great resolution—"I will be the Lord's." You think you cannot have Christ until you have made it. You had better let

Christ come in and help you make it. You never will make it else. You want power to keep your will toned, and to carry your purpose of consecration into your life. You will need a great deal of instruction, correction, encouragement to do this; a mighty love and enthusiasm drawing you on to self-forgetfulness. You cannot have these unless Christ first come in. "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become sons of God;" "a power," as one says, "involving all the actions and states needful to their so becoming, and removing all the obstacles in their way." And so we reach that truth which Norman McLeod puts so pithily in one of his letters: "What is devotedness? It is not a giving up, but a full and complete receiving, in the best possible way (that is, in God's way), of the riches of His bounty. It is being first in sympathy with God, judging and choosing, rejoicing with Him, and then, consequently, resting satisfied with all that He wills us to be, to do, to receive, give up, to suffer or enjoy."

Our failure to realize this exposes us to much unnecessary trouble through our anxious self-scrutiny as to the extent of our consecration. In other words, we make our Christian confidence and peace depend very much upon our feeling satisfied how far we have yielded ourselves to God; upon our assurance that we have given up everything to Him. And thus we establish a false centre of assurance. How often must we be reminded that what we need to be assured of is not anything concerning ourselves—what we are, what we have done—but simply that Christ is

ours, and is available to us for everything. If we can say "Christ is ours," assurance of everything needful follows. We have the best authority for saying that we have all things with Him.

So our life is too much a series of resolutions, of gathering up our energies for successive self-crucifixions, and self-surrenders. When shall we learn that when Christ gets into the life, self strikes at once into the road to the cross? Christ will crucify self better than we can, if we will only receive Him.

And the same truth reaches into our work. Oh how much we need this lesson of receiving Him there. We have so many plans. We begin with such great ideas of serving God. We mark out such grand schemes of usefulness, and we grow impatient and fearful if these plans are interfered with. We set about the thing which God gives us to do, but we see so much else that needs doing, that we grow nervous and afraid that we are not doing the right work or covering enough ground. Let us be at peace. Let us do the work God gives us, and let Christ take care of the rest. Pardon me if I quote again the words of that noble servant of God, McLeod: "I have been," he says, "for years, a very busy man; but I never for an hour sought for work, it was always given to me." Be patient, and only by God's grace keep your mind in that most necessary state, which will discern the Lord's voice when He calls. I have great faith in what I call signs, indescribable hints, palpable hints that, "this is the way, walk ye in it." One cannot, before they come, tell what they

shall be ; but when the fulness of the time comes, when the Lord has appointed us to do anything, something or other occurs that comes home instantaneously to us with the conviction, "The Lord's time has come, I have to do this."

In short, the key to the highest Christian experience is in these two words : Receive Him. Then the strain passes over from our life to Christ's ; then all our care is cast on him. Then Christ takes on himself the task of fitting us for Heaven. He tells us all we need to know, to do, to surrender, to suffer. That is self-consecration, a far deeper, larger thing than merely forsaking this or that. That is something which includes both renunciation and devotion. Oh, the peace of such a life ! What deep-rooting ! What steady growth ! What rich and rare fruitfulness ! What fragrance of holy character and example, what heavenly attraction, mark the life which receives God in Christ, the life with all its celestial energy and beauty.

"To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." Do you ask this morning how you may receive him ? The answer is simple ; it is Christ's own : "Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

REST GIVEN AND REST  
FOUND.

MATTHEW XI.

- (28) Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden,  
and I will give you rest.
- (29) Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ; for I am  
meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto  
your souls.
- (30) For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

## VI.

### REST GIVEN AND REST FOUND.

WHEN Christ was upon earth, each one who came to him approached him, naturally enough, from the standpoint of his own peculiar wants. Some, as he plainly told them, sought him merely to have their hunger satisfied without labor or cost ; because they did eat of the loaves and were filled. Others came to be healed of their diseases. Others, like Nicodemus, to have their own views of truth confirmed.

Our Lord did meet these various desires, but he met them in his own way. He had come to instruct men, not to confirm them in their own fancies ; to give them what they needed, and not always what they wanted. He saw, too, what they did not see, that all human needs sprang from a common source, and could be reached by a common remedy ; and, therefore, he was chiefly concerned to show them the universal need and the universal remedy.

And how wonderfully his wisdom appears in the exhibition of this fact in the text. Suppose Christ in person addressing the whole world, as he is doing to-day through the gospel. Suppose he should say, "Come to me, philosopher, and I will show you where your system is wrong." At once the wayfar-

ing man turns away saying, "He has nothing for me. I know nothing and care nothing about systems of philosophy." Or, let him say to the legalist, "Come unto me. I will adjust all these intricate cases of conscience, all these subtle casuistries, all these nice points of legal obligation." Away goes the philosopher in his turn, saying, "I have heard enough and too much of these precepts and ordinances. They cramp and belittle my life." And the wayfaring man, though he stops to listen for awhile, says at last, "It is too deep for me. These are heavy and grievous burdens." Or he says, "Come unto me and learn." The sinner says, "Nothing for me here. I want forgiveness and peace of conscience, not learning." Or, "Come unto me and get the loaves and fishes." An anxious multitude turn their backs upon him, saying, "Our *souls* are hungry. Our immortal life cries out for nourishment. Our hands are feeling about for God."

But see how Christ, waiving all these for the time, strikes down to something which is common to every human heart: "Come to me and get rest." Here he reaches philosopher, wayfaring man, sinner, beggar, all alike; for every man has his burden which wearies him; his sorrow which saddens him; his toil which frets him. Not one who does not respond to the appeal to the weary and heavy laden. The philosopher: "Yes, I am weary. Shall I never find the truth? Am I not tired in heart and brain with the long, studious search?" The ascetic: "Yes. I am so weary of fasts and vigils, and yet this rebellious



flesh is not subdued, and this uneasy conscience is not at peace." And at this invitation they come, and keep coming—men, and women, and little children—and tell of poverty, and hunger, and care, and sin, each and all weary and heavy laden.

Here, therefore, Christ establishes his point of contact with mankind. He leaves the region of their moral and mental combats and speculations, and comes down to that of their great practical need. From whatever cause, they are not at rest.

Our question to-day is, how Christ meets the need which his wisdom thus discerns in man. And a careful study of this very familiar and comforting text will, I think, show us two phases of his mode of supplying it. Rest is Christ's gift. First, directly, and second, as a result of experience. "I will *give* you rest when you come to me. Ye shall *find* rest, in taking my yoke and in bearing my burden."

Let us look, then, first at Christ's rest as a direct gift.

And you observe that our Lord says nothing at all about taking away burdens or labors. He merely says, "I will give you rest." Indeed, there is a yoke and a burden of his own to be borne.

But this does not meet the ordinary views of men at large; for their idea of rest is summed up in the removal of their burdens and toils. "Only take away my poverty," says the poor man, "and I shall be restful." "Only relieve me of these business claims which hurry and drive me through life, as with whip and spur," says the careworn merchant, "and I shall

be at rest." "Only reveal a few things more clearly. Shed a little more light on this or that point, restore one or two missing links of history, and," says the student, "I shall be at rest." This conception of the cause of restlessness Christ emphatically and radically contradicts. He tells men that their restlessness and weariness come from *themselves* and not from their *circumstances*; that they spring from their very inmost life, their souls, and not from their bodily infirmities. Hence it is to the soul that he offers rest. "Ye shall find rest unto your souls." In other words, if the man's spiritual being shall find its true point and centre of rest, circumstances may remain as they will. Let the man himself once be at rest, and circumstances cannot make him restless. The engineer who looks out upon that reef over which the breakers are foaming and thundering, is not thinking of the means of making the sea quiet, or of restraining the wind. He knows that the winds will continue to rage and the sea to be troubled. But he is thinking how he can put a structure upon that very reef, founded on the very spot where the sea pours in most mightily, against which the waves shall beat in vain, and which shall rise up out of the foam and spray, carrying aloft a beacon, in the darkest night of tempest.

Man is restless, therefore, because he himself is not at rest. Circumstances burden him and drive him to and fro, because he is floating about in the track of circumstances.

As to what man's true point of rest is, the Bible leaves us in no doubt. From beginning to end it

teems with the stories of his misfortunes and sorrows through absence from God. One great purpose runs through it, to bring him back to his point of rest in God. And Christ is only repeating the old lesson when He says, "Come unto me and find rest." It is God who speaks in Him. In those words He says, "Ye are restless and burdened because ye are away from me; and ye are away from me because of sin. It is not that your bodies are enfeebled or your intellects clouded, but that your hearts are estranged from God."

Is there anything strange or unnatural in this announcement? Is it, for instance, a fact strange to science, that when a revolving body gets away from its proper centre, that very fact entails disaster? If yonder planet were by any means to fall out of its orbit, would anything else be required to account for the collision and confusion which would follow in the realms of space? Let that child go away from home, violating the moral obligations, and trampling upon the filial affections which bind him to his father, and is not all his subsequent disaster summed up in the fact that he has ceased to be an obedient son? Can a son of God go away from his Father and not be restless and burdened? By that very act he makes himself the sport of circumstances. By that very act of separation he removes that which God interposes between his obedient child and the shock of circumstances. By that very act he cuts the lines by which God was wont to adjust his life to circumstances. By that very act he forfeits the power which was his

birthright gift as a son of God, to master circumstances. Is it strange that sin, which separates men from God, should be treated by Christ as the root of all weariness and restlessness?

And here, therefore, is where Christ meets the hunger for rest. Though men know it not, it is the hunger of an unforgiven soul. He satisfies it with the gift of pardon and restoration to himself. Let us not mistake Christ here, as we cannot mistake him if we read these words in the light of the whole gospel. Let us not be betrayed into any vapid sentimentalism by the beautiful and comforting word, "rest." It is *moral* rest, rest of the soul in God; rest grounded in sin forgiven, and in lost sonship restored, that Christ means when He says: "I will give you rest." It is for this reason that to His word of comfort to the forgiven, "Go in peace," He is wont to add: "Sin no more."

Rest! Is it not indeed something more than mere quietude when a straying, tempest-tossed soul finds its way back to God? Is it not as well the sense of something abiding that has come into the life; of a solid foundation under one's feet; of moral order restored; of security in the hand of Him who makes all things work together for good? That poor outcast in Simon's banqueting hall—think you the relief and soothing of Jesus' words was all of the rest that came to her as she knelt in tears at his feet? If indeed that were all, it was not likely to stay long with her. Whatever Jesus might say, in the eyes of the world she was still an outcast, and she would go out

from that chamber to be sneered at and abused and disgraced as before. But her calm of heart had a foundation in a precious fact. Jesus understood her. Jesus had received her. Jesus had forgiven her. Whatever the world might say or do hereafter, he was her friend. She had staked her all on that approach to him, and henceforth the mob might howl, and the Pharisee gather up his robes to escape her touch ; she was at rest, because at one with him whom she loved much.

This is Christ's gift to all who come to him. Pardon is rest, not only because the man is relieved of a sense of danger, but because his life has found its centre. This is a most precious consciousness which leads him to sing :

“Now rest my long divided heart,  
Fixed on this blissful centre rest ;  
Nor ever from thy Lord depart,  
With him of every good possessed.”

And a man in this condition is not unlike that one out of whom Christ cast the devil. He sits at Jesus' feet clothed, and in his right mind ; and so sweet is the companionship of his new-found friend that he would fain sit there forever, and enjoy his rest of heart, and pass his life away in peaceful gazing on his Lord.

But he has only begun. He knows rest only in its first stage and in its simplest form. There is a development of the gift which he is to reach by a longer road. Rest has been *given*, but given only to point

him to a rest to be *found*. He knows the rest of pardon, the rest of reconciliation, he is to find the rest of developed character, the rest which is to come in the balance of his disciplined, matured moral nature on this divine centre. He is to learn the rest of Christian manhood worked out through burden-bearing and conflict, and poised on Christ. For this he is put forthwith under Christ's yoke and Christ's burden.

Here, doubtless, is a source of practical embarrassment to many young Christians, in the failure to perceive that God's first gift of rest in pardoning their sins, points beyond itself to a fuller, sweeter rest in Christian experience. They make too much of this first rest, in that they linger in it, and depend upon it to supply what can only come through the manful facing and undertaking of Christian duty and conflict. Their first experience of the love of Christ and of peace with God is so sweet that they think, in proportion as they recede from that experience, they lose ground and endanger their peace, not suspecting that the larger, more substantial peace, which is their birthright as sons of God, lies far on beyond that experience. Doubtless the recovered lunatic, of whom I have spoken, thought he was running a risk in leaving his post at Jesus' feet. Doubtless he shrank from going out from the sight of that beloved face into the brawling world which had known him as a madman. Yet Christ knew when he bade him go home to his friends and exercise his recovered powers in proclaiming his Redeemer, that he would find in this



very work a deeper sense of rest, a more vivid consciousness of his presence, than in the mere passive enjoyment of the sense of healing.

So a young Christian lingers in the still daybreak of his first peace with God. He almost dreads the coming of the bright, hot day, with its glare and noise ; and probably fails to suspect that there may be a deeper peace for him amid all the glare and noise than even in his quiet musing over his first experience of forgiveness. Robertson has truthfully said, that "a man whose religion is chiefly the sense of forgiveness, does not thereby rise into integrity or firmness of character." Jacob rose up from the stone at Bethel in great peace ; with an overpowering, rapturous sense of God's presence. "Truly God was in this place. This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven." And yet, for years Jacob lived in the *memory* of that restful vision, instead of moving out under its impulse to a deeper rest in God. That life at Padan-aram, with all its uneasy plotting and scheming and wrangling, was anything but a restful life. He had to have another vision of God and a grapple that lamed him before he reached that higher plane of character where the supplanter gave place to the prince of God.

Now, if a Christian depends upon his first experience at conversion to keep him happy and restful all his life, he will find himself growing very unhappy and very restless. If he makes his rest to-day depend upon the memory of his rest a year or a month ago, his character will not grow strong. He has a rest to

find ; and to find it daily, as the Israelites found the manna daily at their tent doors. The sense of forgiveness is something, nay, is very much ; but God has a great deal to do for a man in the course of his Christian life, besides forgiving him. Forgiveness is only that which brings him to his true standpoint of life. Forgiveness makes him right with God. From this point an immense and infinitely varied range of experience opens before him. He must strike out into it without delay. Suppose your son of fifteen or sixteen years had offended you in some serious way, and after some time should come back, confess his fault, and be freely forgiven. That first day of reconciliation would be a most precious day to you both. Your sorrow over his disobedience would be gone, his clouded looks and heavy heart would be gone, and he would move with elastic step and smiling face about his accustomed haunts, only too happy to find himself again at home in his father's house. How much you have to teach him. Into what large responsibilities you have yet to introduce him. What large plans your love has framed for him, all which things are now become possible through his repentance and forgiveness. But suppose the boy should be simply anxious to prolong the pleasure of that first day of reconciliation. Suppose he should talk of nothing else but his father's goodness in forgiving him. Instead of setting himself to his studies or duties, he remains in his chamber, or strolls abstractedly about the house or garden, musing on his father's goodness. Now and then there comes a day



when he is a little low-spirited. You yourself are preoccupied and do not say much to him. He begins to think something is wrong, and takes you aside and asks you if he may be sure you have forgiven him. Now you can easily see that that will not do. The boy's whole life is concentrating itself morbidly upon that one point in the past. He is neither doing the duties of a son, nor learning the privileges of a son. He is not finding the joy of doing his father's will daily. He is not feeling the sense of victory in the manful grapple with his old faults, and in his growth in self-control and self-denial. He is not realizing, through experience, that it is in his father's power to do more than to forgive him. And yet, absurd as this may seem, is it not a picture of many a Christian experience? Are there not scores of Christians whose happiness and restfulness are made by themselves to depend upon keeping the memory of forgiven sin at its first vividness? The result is the unhealthiest, weakest religious life imaginable. Such a religious experience is very much as if a bricklayer should try to build a wall with only one point in contact with the foundation. The whole thing would very soon be a heap of ruins. He must have the whole line of his wall resting on the foundation. Just so a healthy Christian life must rest in God all along its line. The single experience of forgiveness is a great and precious one, but it is not strong enough to bear the weight of the whole Christian life. That must touch God daily and everywhere. A Christian experience, with only one lumi-

nous point in it, far back at the beginning, is like a tunnel lighted only at the entrance. The light gets dimmer and dimmer as you go on. And that is not the Scriptural idea of a life in God, for Scripture tells us that "the path of the just shineth more and more even unto the perfect day." A great many people who have gotten hold of the first part of our text, coming to Christ and *receiving* rest, seem to have failed entirely to grasp the second part—*finding* rest under Christ's yoke and burden. It seems as if they had come to Christ only to be forgiven, and then had parted company with him. Such do not know what they lose. The importance of forgiveness and reconciliation we cannot overestimate. They lie at the foundation of all. But as to their forming the best part, the most joyous part of Christian experience, there never was a greater mistake. One might as well compare the joys of infancy to those of strong and cultured manhood. He might, with as good reason, linger at a gateway, examining its carvings, while a paradise lay on beyond. And therefore it is that the apostle puts the case so strongly: "Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection." The alphabet is a very necessary thing; but only an idiot would linger over the alphabet when the vast fields of literature were before him.

It is a good thing for such people, a good thing for us all that the world has to be faced and fought; a good thing that Christ puts us from the beginning under a yoke and a burden. I think so, because I see that the greatest restfulness and the nicest poise of

character have somehow risen up out of the midst of these very disturbing influences. Just as the little coral workers, beginning far down on the ocean's bottom, build patiently up through the deep, until there emerges from the spray a rock, on which by and by trees and flowers grow, and men dwell, and in whose shelter storm-tossed vessels anchor,—so through all the tempests and floods of sorrow and persecution and pain, I see these characters working their way up to fixedness and beauty and fruitfulness; and words which strengthen the world's heart, and stir its sluggishness into heroism come forth from them, and storm-driven souls moor themselves to them, and sorrow and pain creep into their shadow, and draw rest from their restfulness. Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith: nothing in his character is more impressive than its perfect calm; “not the stillness of torpidity, or the silence of the ice-bound Arctic Seas, but a repose consistent with a rich, deep, inexhaustible enthusiasm.”<sup>1</sup> He was the Prince of peace. When he said to his disciples, “Peace I leave you,” it was with a deep and good reason that he added, “*my* peace I give unto you;” for the peace which he gave was that which dwelt in his own, calm, harmonious soul: and yet in him we are bidden to consider “Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself.” And Paul, who lived in the very spirit and temper of Christ: looked at in its outward incidents, there never was a more restless life—

---

<sup>1</sup> Ullmann.

travelling, arguing, preaching, writing ; in prisons, before mobs, and councils and kings, a life of endless variety, a life to which the sense of danger must have become habitual ; and yet we see none of this in the man. The unrest is *round* him, not *in* him ; and, in the midst of its dizzying whirl his own manhood flows out in all its richness, and silently grows in depth and power, and his grand work keeps on its steady course, and his well-weighed words, so full of cheer and instruction, come out of a heart which rests in calm conviction and in undisturbed trust. Depend upon it, there is a point of rest somewhere in the heart of the storm. It must be that this very shifting and tumult cover some blessed secret which those only discover who walk through the midst of flood and fire. This cold, hard, bustling world ! When a man comes fresh and warm from his first contact with Christ, he shrinks from it as from a tumbling and freezing sea. Christ points him to his work in a sphere where it appears to him as if all his spirituality, all his calm, all his bright, cheerful hope must be swallowed up and lost. Perhaps the kind of Christian experience which he has in mind as an ideal will be swallowed up. If his ideal is exhausted in the first raptures of forgiven sin, if it is a monastic ideal of secluded musing and spiritual ecstasy, be sure Christ is striking directly at it. He has something better for him than that, and he means that he shall find it. And, as he goes down with fear and trembling into that uncongenial sphere, and puts his hand to that unpromising work, the first thing he will

learn will be the need of a constant contact of his life with Christ. The memory of the first contact will not answer. He must have Christ with him alway ; and to his surprise he will begin to find that this sense of personal, hourly contact with his Lord swallows up in itself the disturbance and annoyance from without. He will find that the very rage and cruelty and opposition, which drive him closer and closer to Christ, only open to him new secrets of loveliness, and new resources in Christ's character. He will find, to his delight, that it is possible, amid the world's sordidness and meanness, which call out his disgust ; amid its upheavings and tumults, which appeal to his fears ; amid the bitter sorrows which call forth his tears ; amid the drudgery which tires—he will find, I say, that it is possible for a man to carry a peaceful heart in his bosom ; a rest which these things cannot disturb ; a quiet consciousness of the pressure of God's everlasting arms underneath him which shall keep him in perfect peace. This is the rest that is *found*. It is not, it cannot be the rest of the newborn soul. It comes only through experience, only through the pressure of Christ's yoke. Paul said, "I am persuaded ;" as if life and death and things present and things to come had been presenting their arguments and their menaces to shake the repose of his soul, and he had beaten them all back. "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

So then, ye who are in the midst of life's whirl to-day, fighting and bearing, striking and being stricken, do not look backward to an earlier experience of the love and rest which are in Christ, as to some brighter day which never shall kindle again until Heaven's morning break. That was not your best nor your purest rest. Look for rest *in* your conflict. Expect to find it to-day and to-morrow, and all along to the end; to find it in the working out of your Christian manhood; in your conquest over self, in the discipline of sorrow, in the faithful dealing with routine and drudgery. It is there for you. Ye shall find rest, as the world slips away and leaves you alone with Christ, the rest which comes through the deeper stamp of his character upon yours. The reason why many of your lives are so uneasy, is that you are looking for rest in the *removal* of your burden instead of in the *bearing* of it. *The rest lies right under the yoke, and nowhere else.* Learn to seek it there.

“We ask for peace, O Lord,  
Thy children ask Thy peace;  
Not what the world calls rest,  
That toil and care should cease,  
That through bright sunny hours  
Calm life should fleet away,  
And tranquil night should fade  
In smiling day—  
It is not for such peace that we would pray.

“We ask Thy peace, O Lord!  
Through storm, and fear, and strife,  
To light and guide us on,  
Through a long, struggling life:

While no success or gain  
Shall cheer the desperate fight,  
Or nerve, what the world calls  
Our wasted might :  
Yet pressing through the darkness to the light.

“ It is thine own, O Lord !  
Who toil while others sleep,  
Who sow with loving care  
What other hands shall reap ;  
They lean on Thee, entranced  
In calm and perfect rest :  
Give us that peace, O Lord !  
Divine and blest,  
Thou keepest for those hearts who love Thee best.”





THE DIVINE GIFT OF WISDOM.

## JAMES I.

- (5) If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.
- (6) But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering ; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.

## VII.

### THE DIVINE GIFT OF WISDOM.

WISDOM is the central thought of this text. What is wisdom ?

It cannot be defined in a word. In the first place, it is not knowledge. You remember the lines in which the distinction is so well brought out:

“ Knowledge and wisdom, far from being one,  
Have ofttimes no connection. Knowledge dwells  
In heads replete with thoughts of other men ;  
Wisdom, in minds attentive to their own.  
Knowledge, a rude, unprofitable mass,  
The mere material with which wisdom builds,  
Till smoothed and squared and fitted to its use,  
Doth but encumber whom it seems to enrich.  
Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much,  
Wisdom is humble, that he knows no more.”

Wisdom represents, not so much what a man knows, as his perception of the right bearing of knowledge upon practice. In the Scriptures, wisdom is bound up with character. It has been defined as “an insight, rooted in faith, into whatever goes to the perfection and practical efficiency of Christian character.” If, therefore, knowledge grasps the facts and the laws of morals and religion, wisdom discerns the

applications of these facts and laws to right conduct. Knowledge represents only what a man *knows*. Wisdom tells us besides, something of what he *is*. Solomon, viewed as one who knew all the trees and shrubs from the cedar to the hyssop, all beasts and fowl and creeping things and fishes, was merely a man of knowledge. His asking God for heavenly understanding instead of for wealth or power, his decision when the two mothers appeared before him with their claim for the same child, proved him a wise man. Hence, in the Bible, you constantly find wisdom associated with moral traits. In our text, it is connected with trial of faith and with patience. We are told by the Psalmist that its beginning is the fear of the Lord ; and James describes the wisdom which is from above by moral characteristics : it is pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

We have nothing to do, therefore, with that practical shrewdness which goes in the world under the name of wisdom. We are concerned with that divine gift of spiritual insight which acquaints a man with God's truth as it is related to his becoming a good, useful, and truly happy man. The object of living to which we are here directed by the apostle is, that we may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. And we can easily see why patience comes in just here, and why we are exhorted to let it have its perfect work ; because growing perfect and entire is not easily nor quickly done, especially when the standard of perfection is God's.

Here, then, is where the need of wisdom reveals itself. If living were merely a question of getting bread and clothes and shelter and amusement, while it would still be a very hard problem to many, it would be greatly simplified to many more. But the moment you introduce the moral element into life, the moment you make life something to be developed with primary reference to God, to character, and to eternity—the moment, in other words, you add to the problem of getting food and clothing and home, the problem of being pure and truthful and generous and patient and brave and tender—of being Christlike, in short—that moment you greatly ennoble living, but you make it, at the same time, a much more serious and difficult thing. That is true both as to our thinking and our acting. The questions of our age about literature, science, or politics, we can master them, or if not, it does not so much matter. The next generation will do it, or the next, and the solution of many of these questions affects some of us very remotely indeed. But these great moral and spiritual questions growing out of God's relation to us, and out of our relation through God to the world—these touch us. They come into the region of our joys, our successes, our friendships, our choices. We want to answer them each for himself, and yet how successive generations have wrestled with these same questions, and have found them hard questions as we do.

And on the active, practical side of life, it is the same. The hardest thing that you and I confront is,

how to be good, how to keep down the devils in us, and to keep out those around us: how to choke selfishness, how to abate pride, how to rejoice in another's success where we fail, how to keep conscience unsullied on its Godward side. Do you find these things easy, any of you—that is, any of you who have honestly set yourselves to work out this problem, and are not trying to get round it? I think not; and you are not alone in your difficulty either: for these moral questions, both theoretical and practical, are the very questions which we find troubling earnest men as far back as we can read history. “It is a solemn thing to die,” it is said. Truly, it seems to me that living is the solemn thing, and that the solemnity which attaches to death grows mostly out of its relation to life; to the life which it closes, and to the larger life which it introduces.

I repeat, that the moment you introduce the moral element into living, that moment you make living a problem of the first magnitude. Look at our text and context. Here is an exhortation which strikes seven men out of ten as a paradox: “Count it all joy when ye fall into divers trials.” “That is ridiculous,” says the average man of the world. Trial is not a pleasant nor a joyful thing. Not only so, he says it is all wrong and inconsistent that a good, true, generous man should suffer. If he does right, he ought to be prosperous and happy. If he does wrong, why then it is his own fault if he suffers. That was the way in which Eliphaz, the Temanite, put it to Job; and Job himself, who had tacitly accepted the same popular



view of reward and punishment, for that very reason found his affliction such a mystery. Why do the good suffer? is one of the main questions underlying that wonderful poem. So Eliphaz stands by the ash heap, and begins to moralize. He has a very easy explanation of that pitiable spectacle, "Bethink thee now: whoever perished, being innocent, and when have the upright been cut off? As I have seen, they who plow iniquity and sow mischief, reap it. At the breath of God they perish." The logic of all which is: "You, Job, must have sinned, else you would not be afflicted." And because Job persists in maintaining his integrity, and refuses to renounce his conscious innocence until he has been proved guilty, he is loaded with reproaches by his friends. And that hard problem was not solved until there came a man of more sorrows and of higher wisdom than Job, who said: "Every branch in me that beareth fruit, he purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit." ·

So as to the matter of faith which James here tells us is to be developed by temptation. A large part of the world is still fighting the claim of faith to a place in character, and especially to the first place. "Why so much admonition and so much trial to develop faith? Sight, not faith, is the thing. Walk only where you can see. Believe only the evidence of your senses." And we who recognize the claim of faith, and admit that the life of faith is the higher, rarer life, do we find it easy to live by faith? Are we always patient under the trials which test and aim to develop faith? Is it always easy to be cheerful when

we go after God into rough and crooked ways? Does faith always make our dark nights full of songs? Do we find it easy to believe in God's love for us while the strokes of His rod are falling?

All these, you see, are questions of character. Faith, patience, temptation resisted, yielded to, or translated into power, are elements in character-building. A thousand experiences test our faith: a thousand temptations call out our strength and courage and caution: a thousand burdens tax our patience. If the problem were only to get round the burdens, or to shirk the trials, or, at worst, to nerve one's self doggedly to bear and get along with such things somehow, it were comparatively simple; but to walk by an intelligent faith in God, with a clear consciousness of the power and preciousness of the principle of faith, to be initiated into the laws of that life where trial and suffering are God's ministers of perfection, nothing will serve us here but wisdom.

If that will solve these questions for us, if that will unravel the great Sphynx riddle of life, shall we call the Bible's estimate of wisdom extravagant, even when expressed in Job's words: "Man knoweth not the price thereof, neither is it found in the land of the living. The depth saith: It is not in me, and the sea saith: It is not with me. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it; and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold?"

And as we face, sometimes almost in desperation,

these great questions of right, godly living, this fight and climb toward goodness, as we cry with Job, "Where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding?" we are met with the simple answer of the text: "Ask God for it, and you shall have it." Is it not beautiful, godlike, the large, generous way in which the Bible offers the most rare and precious gifts to men? What a sense of omnipotence and of infinite love pervades such offers as this. The thing you want is God's, simply ask for it and you shall have it.

And this divine generosity is thrown into high relief by the very wording of the text: "God, who giveth to all men liberally." But our translation, while it states the truth, covers up a part of it which is very precious, namely, the description of God as, *in His very nature*, a giver. Literally it is, "let him ask of God *the giver*," and those words, "the giver," are put first to emphasize them. So that we are not only told where to ask, but are encouraged to ask by being told that God is, in His very nature, a giving God.

More than this, we are told *how* God gives; which is not the least important element in the case. For you know how, in giving and receiving among men, the value of the gift itself to the receiver is greatly affected by the mode of bestowal. If I do for my neighbor the favor he asks with sullen reluctance, with words which show that I regard him as an intruder and his request as an impertinence, I make the favor a bitterness instead of a blessing to him.

A penny given, a little, insignificant service rendered with a smile and a blessing, is more to the receiver than a princely gift bestowed with a curse. That way of giving has found expression for itself in the phrase, "to do one a kindness," which is more than simply doing a favor, however great. Now this characteristic of God's giving is strongly marked. We are relieved of the fear that God will give what we ask in such a way as to make us regret that we ever asked. "He giveth, *simply*," for that is the true meaning of the word, rendered "liberally." And then, by way of explaining the word, there is added, "and upbraideth not." So that the text says just this: that God, when He bestows a gift, adds nothing to it which may take from its graciousness. He gives the gift simply; which is just what Solomon says in other words: "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it;" and Paul likewise tells us that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." If men's own conscious wickedness and unworthiness make God's gifts a reproach to them, the reproach is not God's. God gives the gift simply and in good faith: the reproach comes from the receiver's side. There is no reproach given with the sunshine which streams into the bad man's window and awakes him to another day of crime. There is no reproach falling with the rain and the dew into the field won by oppression and robbery. "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

Then, too, as regards human giving, self enters in

various subtle ways into our gifts, unconsciously often, so that not unfrequently we give a stone where we think we are giving bread. Sometimes a request betrays the folly or the ignorance of the asker; and then, how often the sense of our own superiority gets into our answer, and gives it a flavor of reproach exquisitely painful to him who asked of us only help and not upbraiding. Sometimes a child or a weak brother comes to us for aid in some matter which, perchance, we think quite beneath our dignity. Do we always stoop gracefully and cheerfully to the little thing, or does our reluctance or inability to unbend make itself appreciated, and carry with it an upbraiding? Our children ask absurd questions sometimes, and we are in danger of checking the healthful spirit of inquiry, of doing the little hearts a wrong and of brushing the bloom from their impulsive naturalness, by our ridicule or our rebuke. That is not simple giving; giving out of the simple, unmixed desire to do another good. And that is not the way God gives. He has no need to be anxious for His own greatness or dignity. He is so great that He can afford to be simple. He is too loving to despise the smallest matter which concerns His feeblest child. If our children's requests appear absurd to us, how must many of our requests appear to God? What folly may He not detect under so many of the smooth and stately petitions which daily rise to His ear? I think if the *wisdom* of our prayers were all that kept them from reproach, we should get little besides upbraiding at the mercy-seat. But no: "Like

as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." And why? For the very reason which might seem to make the approach to Him so hard : because He knows so much. Ignorance and weakness have their best chance of a hearing with infinite wisdom. He knoweth our frame, our mental and moral, no less than our bodily constitution. Littleness ceases to be a reproach in His presence. We are all alike little there ; and it is a delight to be able to shelter ourselves under such greatness ; to be encompassed by it and swallowed up in it, for it touches us everywhere so lovingly and so intelligently.

If, then, any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God. No one else has the gift to give him, and if any one else had it, if the thing lay in human hands, James could not speak as confidently as he does here about the certainty of receiving it. But with a God as the giver whose very nature it is to give, and with the word of Christ behind him, "Every one that asketh receiveth ; and he that seeketh findeth ; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened,"—our apostle has a good warrant for saying : "It shall be given him ; let him ask in faith, nothing wavering."

Now, do you see how much is implied in this assurance, and what an invaluable one it is to you and me ? Bear in mind the line of our thought. Remember we are concerned with the question of making character, of living rightly, of getting manhood out of trial and temptation, of cutting a straight path through the besetments of this world. This is our problem, and this statement of the text means simply that you



and I can solve that problem ; that we can learn how to live, and to live purely and nobly ; that if life is a fight, we may be victors in that fight ; that strong and subtle as temptation is, bitter though trial be, though life in the moral sphere presents many and hard questions, we need not walk the world as ignorant victims led to sacrifice by sin and sorrow, but rather may be king's sons and daughters in our Heavenly Father's house, having our conversation in heaven, making trial and difficulty minister to our perfection, and being intelligent sympathizers and co-workers with God. This is the gift of wisdom. This result only wisdom, the wisdom from above, will enable us to compass. God only holds the key to that alphabet of ciphers—life ; and God is pledged to give us that key for the asking.

But as to the nature of that gift, you are to notice particularly one thing. I called your attention, at the outset, to the distinction between wisdom and knowledge, and showed that wisdom, in the scriptural sense, is bound up with character. And in pursuance of that thought, remember that while character and right living are the ends which wisdom contemplates, wisdom also begins not in knowledge but in character. That is to say, if you ask me how God will answer your prayer for wisdom, while I can by no means answer you fully, I can tell you how He will *begin* with you in every case. Not by drawing up for you systems of living, social theories, methods of study and of exercise, moral philosophies. He will begin by laying down for you a basis of character in these



two words—Fear God. He will tell you that wisdom—the wisdom you want to live by—depends first, not on what you know, but on what you are. It is not knowledge that solves the great, practical problem of life. It is being in right relation to God. Try and get that truth sharply defined in your thought; then you will have some idea of what you are asking for when you ask for wisdom. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Knowledge, indeed, is not excluded from heavenly wisdom, but knowledge is to get its direction and its quality, and its application from the stand-point of the fear of God. Otherwise it has nothing to do with wisdom. I say this on the authority of our Lord himself. He was discussing this very question how to live, and he said that the first thing was not to know, but to be right toward God: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” The rest would come in due time and order. And when Nicodemus came to him, assuming that the first element of heavenly wisdom was knowledge, and saying, “Rabbi, thou art a teacher, thou doest great things by God’s help, thou canst teach us the things we want to know;” he received an answer which cut down to the very roots of his mistake. The first thing, Nicodemus, is not to know, but to be. Entrance into the kingdom of God and life in it, is, primarily, a matter of character, not of knowledge. “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” And so, again, when Jesus went up to the feast and taught, the Jews marvelled. They thought of nothing but his knowl-

edge. They said, "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" And he answered them: "If any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine," whether it be God's truth or no.

Perhaps you will repeat the question: How will God impart wisdom to me? I have told you how He will begin; beyond that I cannot say. His methods and His instruments will differ in different cases, according to the material upon which He has to work. It has always been so; even as the writer to the Hebrews tells us that God spake "*in divers manners*" unto the fathers. He has used many and strange instruments in times past. He has made very common things the means of introducing men to His wisdom:—a stone on which Jacob pillowed his head; a thorn-bush where Moses pastured his flock; a common stick in Moses' hand; a dumb beast on which Balaam rode; a flask of oil in a poor widow's hut. There is no predicting what things or what facts God may make vehicles of His wisdom to us. One or two things we may count on as very likely to happen, when we ask and receive God's gift of wisdom. One is that our wisdom will be thrust aside in a great many cases; that our conclusions and pet theories will be contradicted; and that very different courses will be marked out for us from those we had chosen for ourselves. Another is that we shall not get our wisdom all at once. Jesus himself, in his earthly life, increased in wisdom as well as in stature. We must be prepared for God's taking time, and developing His gift along the line of the trials and temptations

which go to perfection of character. Much of our wisdom will come through these. So that in the attainment of this gift, as everywhere in our Christian discipline, we must "let patience have her perfect work."

Another fact is that the wisdom which God gives will leave us in ignorance of a great many things. A part of our wisdom will come in our learning that there are things we cannot learn, and in our cheerful waiting before those closed gates, till God shall see fit to open them. Such will be some of the deep, fundamental mysteries of His government. Such will be some of His providences which touch us most hardly; dispensations of His which shall seem charged only with wrath. Mere knowledge, or mere human reason, in the presence of these things, will be like one who tries to combine the two sides of a stereoscopic picture with the naked eye. He cannot bring them into unity, even as reason cannot reconcile God's providences with each other. Wisdom will apply the glass of faith, and keep it fixed, spite of all the confusion, until, not perhaps till the clearer light of heaven shall have risen, all the dealings of God shall fall into place as one perfect whole.

Here, then, let us sum up the matter. The great question for you and me to answer is, how to live and to build up character according to God's law.

The question is one which human research cannot answer satisfactorily. History shows that the men who have had most knowledge, have not known best how to live.

It is answered for us by the offer of wisdom ; that heavenly gift, which is pure and peaceable and gentle and patient ; that gift which, in its very essence, is bound up with character.

The gift is promised us for the asking, on the authority of a God whose nature it is to give, and who offers the gift simply, to all who ask in faith, without anything to detract from its value.

And this wisdom, beginning in the fear of God, is not only for the general regulation of life. It descends to details. You and I can have it and avail ourselves of it in those daily, petty trials and questions which make up so much of life. It is a gift for mothers, to teach them to be right and to keep right in all the petty perplexities of domestic life ; for business men, to help them in maintaining high ideals and honest lives ; for school children, to keep them faithful to duty, and to solve for them the questions of right doing which arise in their intercourse with their fellows. All of us may walk with God, and when we are ignorant, ask and receive.

If such is the importance and value of this gift, what is life without it ? Is it not a serious thing for any man to launch out upon that troubled sea without this compass ? Is it not, in view of what we have seen, the best economy of life to begin it in the fear of God, through faith in Jesus Christ ? Shall we not be held to a fearful responsibility if, with divine wisdom placed freely at our control, and offered with abundant love, we choose to live by our own theories, and make shipwreck of life at last ?



THE PATCHED GARMENT.

LUKE V.

- (36) And he spake also a parable unto them. No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old ; if otherwise, then he both will rend the new, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old.



## VIII.

### THE PATCHED GARMENT.

AT the feast which Levi made for his friends on the occasion of his forsaking his old employment and entering upon the service of Christ, the disciples of John and the Pharisees for once joined forces, in charging upon Christ neglect of the fasts which formed so important a part of their practice.

Our Lord's answer furnishes several points of great interest, but we are concerned at present with only one part of it ; that, namely, which contrasts the old and the new—the legal and the gospel dispensations. Stated fasts belonged to the ceremonial economy. That was now passing away with the entrance of the gospel. The gospel economy, with its large liberty, would indeed permit, and even encourage, fasting or any similar rite as a means conscientiously adopted to promote a higher spiritual consecration and service ; but the day of fasting for fasting's sake had gone by. The gospel system was a new and beautiful whole. Men were not to take such parts of it as commended themselves to their acceptance, and to seek to combine them with the worn-out system of rites and ceremonies. The incongruity would be apparent. The new system would be mutilated, the old would

lose its consistency. The effect would be like that of taking a piece out of a new garment to mend a worn-out one. The new garment would be spoiled, and the rotten threads of the old garment would not hold the new piece; it would soon tear itself loose, and the rent would be made worse. Let the old garment be thrown aside altogether, and the new substituted. Let the old system of ceremonies go, and let the gospel be accepted entire.

The applications of this truth are very numerous. It would be interesting to study them, for instance, in the history of the church, and to see how the various attempts to combine the gospel, or portions of it with other faiths, have failed. The history of the apostolic church shows how futile were the efforts to graft it upon Judaism. Peter, to take a single instance, would have striven to make his new faith and apostolic zeal work with the Jewish separativeness which would have kept him from the gentile Cornelius. That vision of the great sheet, with its mingled beasts, tore the patch loose from the old garment at once. Still worse was the fate of those later attempts to combine the gospel with the philosophies of heathenism. The two would not go together. The patched system was worse rent than the out-worn creed.

But I wish to discuss this fact in its more limited relations to personal faith and character; and, with this view, let us first take up the figure of the text—this new patch on old cloth—in some very familiar applications.

We appreciate easily the offensiveness of what is incongruous. It is fatal alike to beauty, to symmetry, and to effectiveness. A sparrow is not as beautiful as a bird of Paradise, yet the little brown bird is a pleasant sight. Try to fasten upon him the gorgeous plumage of the other bird, and you make him ridiculous at once. His beauty consists in being simply himself. An inferior thing that is constant to its own ideal, consistent, true, is a far more useful and a far more pleasurable thing than when you try to make it look like something else, or do the work of something else, or take it out of its place and put it in circumstances to which it has no adaptation. Take a plain stone wall, for instance. There is nothing very artistic about it, but if it be well and truly built, a simple wall and nothing else, it is not an unpleasing object. But now go to the ruins of that Gothic church, and bring away the sculptured key-stone of an arch, the fragments of a carved screen, a column with an elaborately cut capital, and sundry pinnacles and gargoyles, and work these into the masonry of your wall, and set up your pinnacles along the top, and let your gargoyles protrude their hideous heads at intervals: you have made a ridiculous thing out of your stone wall. People at once see that something is there which belongs to quite another order of things. Everybody acknowledges the difference between the church and the plain wall, and the difference offends no one so long as each keeps its place and is simply itself. But the attempt to patch one with the other emphasizes the

difference offensively. The rent is made worse : the beauty is taken from the church, and the wall is made ugly.

I remember an old farmer who, when he was about sixty years of age, professed faith in Christ. He was full of zeal, and, for a time, was like a flaming torch in the neighborhood. I never saw a man who seemed to feel so keenly the awful risk he had run in delaying his salvation so long. He could not be in a prayer-meeting without rising to warn his fellow-men against his mistake. But he was also an ignorant man, and his new experience only deepened his sense of his ignorance of the things of God ; and he used to shut himself in his room with volumes on systematic theology, and painfully wade through their contents, and then come down to the prayer-meeting and attempt to reproduce what he had read ; and you can easily imagine the result. So long as he kept to his own experience, so long as he was just himself, speaking of what he knew and felt, he spoke with power. The moment he tried to patch the theologian upon the plain farmer, he spoiled it all. The theology was ruined and so was the personal experience. The ignorance which no one would have thought of in the plain man speaking out of a full heart, was thrust into prominence by the ridiculous attempt to play the part of a theological teacher. The rent was made worse.

It would be easy to multiply similar illustrations. These are all that are necessary to show us the ordinary applications of the truth. Let us now look at

its applications to the gospel as a system and as a life.

The gospel is a unit ; one and inseparable. It is sufficient unto itself. It asks no aid from any source outside of itself. It needs no combination to develop its peculiar virtues. The great truth it sets before men is Christ all, and in all. And it does its work for and in man upon the condition that it be received as it is : entire, adding nothing and subtracting nothing. It does not engage that there shall be virtue in its fragments apart from the whole. You may take up the lock of that rifle, and pull and snap it as much as you please, and it will be a good while before you shoot anything. You must combine it with the barrel and the stock. Neither lock, stock, nor barrel is good for anything, except as they together make up a rifle. Similarly, I cannot answer for the effect of a single Christian precept or doctrine disjoined from the whole. It is only a patch, cut out from a good, solid garment, and refusing to match with any other fabric.

Nicodemus came to Christ full of this notion of patching pieces of the new Teacher's doctrine upon the old Jewish robe. The thought of any inconsistency or incongruity never occurred to him. He simply expected to get from Christ certain new items of knowledge, certain new maxims of duty, perhaps, which he might combine with his familiar religious ideas. Christ very soon opened his eyes to that delusion. It is curious to see how the Rabbi's first remark and Christ's answer are like pieces from two

entirely different garments. The Rabbi says, "Thou art a teacher from God. The kingdom of God is mere teaching and learning." Christ says, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. The entrance into the kingdom of God, Nicodemus, is not through learning, but through becoming a new man. The kingdom of God embraces new works indeed, but it requires a new man to do the new works. The question is not a question of a few scraps of wisdom which I might give you, a few works which you think you might learn to do. It is a question of a new economy, a new administration, a new nature in you." Christ's words in Nicodemus' mouth, and Christ's works in his hands, would have been indeed like a piece of a new garment sewn upon an old one. The rent would have been made worse. They would have torn him loose from both economies. The Jews would have rejected such sentiments with horror, and would probably have stoned him for blasphemy. They would have cursed him as a traitor to the traditions of the elders. The Jewish ceremonial robe would not hold that new piece for a moment : while, on the other hand, the new garment would have been disfigured. Nicodemus, the Master in Israel, with a few of Christ's precepts on his lips, and a little of Christ's practice in his life, would not have represented Christ and the gospel, any more than the patch represents the garment. He would have been a caricature of a Christian.

And yet it is on this very kind of patchwork, this effort to piece fragments of Christianity upon other



systems, or to combine the practice of gospel precepts with an unrenewed nature, that scores and hundreds of men and women are engaged to-day. I do not think that square rejection of the gospel is much more deplorable than these attempts, which really amount to the same thing. I doubt if hostile systems are more dangerous than these hybrids.

Take the gospel as a history and as a moral code. Nothing is more common than the practice of picking out of it this or that, holding it up to admiration, and even reverence, working it up with some philosophic system of morality, and, at the same time, casting away a large part of what accompanies it in the New Testament. Modern literature is full of such experiments. Skeptical schools are founded upon this theory of dealing with the gospel. We are told, for example, that the gospel system of morality is of a very pure and elevated character, that Christ himself was a model of excellence, and, in the same breath, that the gospels are a mixture of history and of legend, that miracles are an absurdity and an impossibility, that Jesus was no more than man, and that his dying on the cross for the world's sins is a mere theological fiction. We are met in the same volume by such a panegyric as this: "Whatever may be the surprises of the future, Jesus will never be surpassed. All ages will proclaim that among the sons of men, there is none born greater than Jesus. The sermon on the mount is the most beautiful code of perfect life that any moralist has ever traced." And then, turning back to read the life of this wonderful



moralist, we find it gravely asserted that the greatness of his moral ideal compelled him to seek its accomplishment by impure means, by pretending to be what he was not, by concocting juggler's tricks to pass with the multitude for miracles.<sup>1</sup> Is not this, indeed, rending the new garment? This cutting of patches out of the New Testament has gone on at such a furious rate that one may be pardoned for using the caustic words of a modern apologist,<sup>2</sup> in speaking of the boldness with which the name of "Christian" is assumed, "When you have ceased to believe all that is specially characteristic of the New Testament, its history, its miracles, its peculiar doctrines, you may still be a genuine Christian." They separate the example of Jesus from his salvation. They cut out his teaching, but leave behind his atonement. He is an apostle, but he is not a High Priest. His manhood can be worked into their philosophies, but it must be cut loose from his divine nature. Christ was a splendid pattern of manhood. Oh, yes; but everything in the New Testament relating to miracles is fable and legend; because, you see, a miracle is plainly impossible.

Now the question at present is not whether Christ was divine, or whether miracles are possible or not. The point is that whatever leaves out these elements, is not Christianity, however it may call itself so. It were as sensible to cut a piece from yonder splendid velvet mantle, and sew it upon a calico gown, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Renan.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Rogers.

then to say that the calico is velvet. Christianity, it cannot be repeated too often, is not the combination of certain elements of the gospel with some moral or philosophic theory of man's devising. It is the gospel pure and simple ; the gospel entire, the gospel as it was given by Christ, and illustrated by Christ, and borne witness to, with "signs and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost," and made over to man in its fulness and power by the blood of the everlasting covenant. He who would call himself Christian must take the gospel thus, or call himself by another name. Christ's exalted humanity is not the gospel. The sermon on the mount is not the gospel. Christ's example is not the gospel. Christ's deity is not the gospel. Miracles are not the gospel. But Christ's deity and humanity ; Christ's person and doctrine ; precept and example ; miracles and gracious words ; atonement and teaching, all blend in one consummate whole to form the gospel ; and any presentation of it which leaves out any of these, belittles it, and rends the new and perfect garment.

The application of any of these elements disjoined from the rest is equally unfortunate. They fare like the new piece on the old garment. Take Christ's person and join it with any human philosophy of morals, with the best and purest of the much lauded pagan creeds, and your elements will not combine. Christ does not fit into Stoicism, or Platonism, or Mahometanism. Take the story of Socrates and put the Christ of the gospel in the place of Socrates, and

the result would be simply monstrous. Christ is too large for these. He is of another mould and of another fibre. He tears loose from them on every hand. His aims are different, his spirit is purer, his character is nobler.

You say, perhaps, you accept the historic gospels so far as they present Christ as a man, and you piece this mere humanity of Jesus upon your rationalism which rejects miracles. I have only to say, when you find yourself confronted in that very manhood with a greater miracle than was ever ascribed to the Son of man, try to find your way out of the difficulty through the mere manhood of Christ. Try to explain his life, his teaching, his power in the world by human conditions, and see if the rent be not made worse.

You say, and say honestly, no doubt, that you want to be right and to do right, but you can accept the gospel only in part. Christ's moral code is all very well, but the doctrine of the new birth you cannot accept. So you go to cutting patches again. You cut the moral code clear from the new birth. You will keep Christ's precepts without being a new creature. You will sew the new code upon the old nature.

Very well. Some people in a city think they will build a fountain. They engage an engineer, and a noted sculptor. A beautiful design is carried out in stone or bronze. The water is to pour from vases in the hands of sea-nymphs, and to spout from the horns of tritons. At last all is ready. The crowd assemble to witness the opening of the fountain. The signal is given, there is a little spirt from a jet here and there,

and then all is dry as before. The stupid engineer has drawn his water from a point almost as low as the base of the fountain, and there is no head to send the water through the pipes. But a more competent workman comes to the rescue. He lays a large main. He leads it to a deep lake or reservoir far up above the town; and now, at the signal, the crystal waters shoot high into the air, and drape the beautiful forms with their falling spray. Oh, my friend, I greatly fear you have not rightly estimated that moral system of Christ. It is grander than you think; higher than you are aware; and to make your life flow through it to refresh the world, you will need something besides the pressure of your feeble will. Your reservoir is too low down. If your life is to fill that godlike outline of virtue, its impulse must be divine. If your impulse is earthly, your life will be earthly. That moral code was meant for a new man, and nothing but a birth from above, nothing but an impulse generated and maintained by God Himself, will ever enable you to live it. The new code and the new man will not be separated. If they shall not go together the gospel will be caricatured by you, and the new precepts will break loose continually from the old will and the old passions and the old habits, and the rent will be worse.

Men talk of turning over a new leaf—of beginning over again. How many times you hear it. "Yes, I have been careless, self-indulgent, hasty and passionate; I am going to try and do better." Never does the old year strike its last hour, that hundreds and

thousands of people are not lying wakeful and thoughtful upon their beds, or sitting with sober meditation in their closets, and gathering up their faculties into mighty resolutions for the year to come. "I will swear no more. I will drink no more. I will go to the house of God. I will begin to read my Bible." The resolutions are good and honest, no doubt. It is a good thing that one's attention has been called to those faults. It will be a better thing if he can carry out his resolution and master them; but, alas, neither the good resolutions nor their accomplishment go far enough. It is patch-work still; patching pieces of the gospel on the old nature; a temperance piece, and a Bible-reading piece, and a church-going piece, upon a nature which, in its very quality and essence, is estranged from God. The man gives up an indulgence here and there, says to God in effect, "Your moral law may come and occupy this ground which has been occupied by my misdoing;" but such an entrance of God's law is like the occupation of some remote outpost of a fortified town by an invader. The citadel is still unreached. The situation is commanded by the garrison of the town. There is no conquest until the invader gets in there. You reform a drunkard. It is a good thing, a thing to thank God for. And yet making him a sober man does not accomplish the work which Christ wants to do on him. Making him a sober man will not save him. He may become a sober man and remain an avaricious man, a dishonest man, an unkind man, a licentious man. The man is not re-

formed ; the fountain of his life is not cleansed. He is better than he was in that one thing, but he is not a new creature in Christ Jesus. His reform is by no means a safe one either. He has taken a pledge ; he has made a solemn vow in good faith, but the pledge is a patch sewn upon an enervated will, upon a depraved appetite, upon a moral nature enfeebled by indulgence, and these are too weak to hold the stitches. It will not be strange if the rent is made worse. Give the man a new nature, a new point of rest, a new impulse to duty, a new and ruling passion for Christ, a will sustained by faith ; make his whole life one of reliance on another's strength and another's merit, and you surround his temperance with something that will hold it. It is no longer a patch, but of the solid fabric woven of virtue, knowledge, faith, love, patience.

Yes, that is what Christ wants in his work upon men—a new creature ; a garment like his own, one piece, without seam. On you who are revolving to-day the question of duty and of destiny, this truth forces itself. Christianity has so woven itself into the social fabric, Christ's ideas circulate so unconsciously in the very life-blood of society, that hundreds of men exhibit Christian traits, and are swayed more or less by Christian precepts without being Christians, and are content with this partial, fragmentary reproduction of the gospel. But it is with such as when, from the ruins of a buried city, one digs out a beautifully chiselled marble hand or head. Men say, “ how beautiful the whole must be.”



The very beauty of the fragment creates special disappointment at the loss of the statue. The rent is made worse. To one who looks at this matter from Christ's standpoint, a moral man without consecration to Christ is a sad spectacle. The sense of his great, fundamental need is heightened by his very excellencies. He is so honorable, so upright, so kindly, he bears himself so nobly in trouble, he is so helpful to others, that we long for the presence in him of that one power that would gather up these shining qualities into itself, and fuse them into one absorbing enthusiasm for Christ, and set them all working together toward the high aims of Christ's kingdom. There was sorrow in more than one heart that day when the young ruler turned his back on Jesus, and refused the one thing which he lacked. Jesus mourned no less than he, but for a different cause. He loved him for his zeal, his honesty, his fidelity to the teachings of his childhood, but he grieved at the refusal to follow him, which vitiated the whole.

I say to you plainly, you who seek virtue, you who believe in goodness, you who love and would lead pure lives—only one thing will compass your desire. It is not the forsaking of this or that evil habit. It is not the adoption of this or that Christian precept. It is not the assent to such detached portions of the gospel as may commend themselves to your reason. These are good, but they need a principle to unify them, and to direct them upon the chief good, and to mould them into a life. But one thing is need-



ful, and that is the new life of the gospel, a new birth in Christ Jesus ; the gospel entire, its moral transformation as well as its precepts ; the gospel entire, nothing but the gospel, Christ all, and Christ in all. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Happy he, who, at the foot of the cross, like that soldier who watched the crucified Lord, receives as his lot the whole seamless robe of Christ. Remember, it is not a virtue and a vice here and there that are in conflict in man. It is two principles, two natures, two economies, two men ; and the work of Christ centres in making of twain one new man, reconciling both in one body on the cross. Paul sums up the whole matter in his Epistle to the Colossians. He bids them indeed put away individual vices, "anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communications, falsehood ;" but as the root and main-spring of all this he says : "Ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him."

Oh ye who would be pure, busy yourselves no longer with this or that fault or virtue. Ye must be born again. Turn from your sins and your virtues to yourselves. Let your prayer be not only "Wash me from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin ;" but "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."



INFANCY AND MANHOOD IN  
THE SPHERE OF FAITH.

## HEBREWS XI.

- (23) By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child ; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.
- (24) By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter ;
- (25) Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season ;
- (26) Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt : for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.
- (27) By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king ; for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible.
- (28) Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the first-born should touch them.
- (29) By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land : which the Egyptians assaying to do, were drowned.

## IX.

### INFANCY AND MANHOOD IN THE SPHERE OF FAITH.

IN these verses we are shown two distinct periods in the life of Moses. The first of these is the period of his infancy and childhood. It covers the time of his unconscious life, of his helplessness, when his destiny is at the disposal of others: of his training, when others give the shape to his thoughts and studies and habits. The second period is that of his manhood. Here his life is self-determined. Here he gives instead of receiving the law; teaches, instead of being tutored; has his own definite responsibilities and duties, for which he alone is answerable.

These two periods of his life are very different; but they have one element in common: they both bear the mark of *faith*. Faith in God is the atmosphere in which the whole life of Moses develops. Faith is the power which determines the character of his infancy no less than of his manhood. The only difference is that, in the first period of his life he is the subject of his parents' faith; that the influences which shape his childhood grow out of their faith, while, in the second period, he exercises that faith for himself, and makes all the choices and decisions of his man-

hood under its power, and does his life-work by its means.

The little babe appears in the Hebrew household at a peculiarly unfortunate crisis, as it would seem to us. Aaron and Miriam had grown up unmolested ; but this child is met by an edict of Pharaoh commanding his destruction. The child was peculiarly beautiful : traditions of his beauty are found in ancient records. Stephen, in his review of the history of the Jewish people in the seventh chapter of Acts, speaks of him as "beautiful unto God," or, as we should say, "divinely beautiful." The very beauty of the child was, to the mother, a token of divine approval, and a sign that God had some special design concerning him ; and this, not from any peculiar revelation made before his birth, nor from faith in the patriarchal promises, but from her natural love for her child—that feeling which is so quick to rise in a mother's heart as she bends over the cradle of a son, that he is destined for some great work in the world. It was not here that her faith began to work. Even nature teaches parents that they owe a duty to their offspring ; and this sense of duty develops along with the parent's knowledge of God. In the case of Moses, both these influences combined to make them resist the command of Pharaoh. It was a dangerous thing to refuse or to attempt to evade the command of an Eastern despot ; but the law of nature and the law of God alike constrained this father and mother to preserve their child's life at any hazard. Hence, the bulrush ark among the reeds, and the watching

sister. And the hiding of the child is praised in the text as an act of faith, because the parents' faith was manifested in their not obeying the tyrant's commandment ; but in fulfilling, without fear of man, all that was required by that parental love which God approved. It was manifested by the means adopted by the mother when she could no longer hide Moses in her cottage. She committed him to the Nile, in faith that he would be cared for.

Thus Moses was, if I may so speak, launched into life by the hand of faith ; and it can hardly be doubted that the mother's faith, however rudimentary, left its impress on the boy. His very name, given by the Egyptian princess, recalled the strange history of his infancy ; and who can say that his mother, receiving him back into her arms as a gift from God, and nursing him in Pharaoh's palace, did not make his dawning consciousness acquainted with the God who had saved him from the king and from the river ?

We know almost nothing of any influences going to keep alive in Moses the knowledge and the fear of God during the years of his childhood. We know that he was brought up under circumstances which would seem likely to extinguish in him the faith of his fathers ; and he received, as the adopted son of the royal house, a thoroughly Egyptian training. He was learned in all the learning of the Egyptians. He was taught not only by sages, but by priests. He was trained not only in science, but in the Egyptian idolatry and superstition.

It is all the more surprising and gratifying, there-



fore, as we enter upon the second stage of Moses' history, to find in him a clearly developed faith in God, and a strong national feeling. The life which was begun in the faith of the parents, develops the same faith as its own master impulse. The text very clearly states that the principle of Moses' choices, the rule of his life, the secret of his endurance, the reason for the high place he holds in history, was faith in God. The point I wish to emphasize is, that the two parts of this life are made one by this principle of faith. That its second stage, with its solemn responsibilities, its wonderful works, its honors and achievements, was a natural outgrowth from the first stage in which parental faith committed him to God.

You observe, in the first place, that the life thus committed to God by the parents was continuously under God's direction. It is very easy to see this now, looking back from this distance, and seeing the life in its whole course. The circumstances of Moses' childhood, indeed, would seem at first to contradict this view. It would seem a strange and hazardous thing to throw a child, whom God was preparing to lead His people out of the civilization and idolatry of Egypt, into the very place where he would be most likely to become attached to both the civil institutions and the religion of Egypt; to throw him there, too, at an age when he was most susceptible to their impressions. It would seem a dangerous experiment to rear the man who was to be the leader and confidential adviser and the associate of a nation of slaves, the man who was to work out his mission amid forty

years of toil and hardship and desert life, in the luxurious atmosphere of an Egyptian palace ; in the society of the learned and cultured, and with that abundant leisure which the true student demands. And yet God was wiser than men. If He found it necessary to throw Moses into such temptations He could supply corresponding safeguards. What these were, I have already said we do not know. We merely know that at the end of this period he comes before us as a man, with a firm faith in God, with a deep enthusiasm for his people, and with a tender sympathy for their wrongs. And while God has kept his heart from becoming estranged from his faith and from his nation, He has also put him in possession of all that Egypt has had to give him of knowledge and culture. Egypt was training her own avenger in her own schools. The Pharaohs themselves were furnishing every appliance which their wealth and their wisdom could command, to the man who was going to take more than half a million of their useful servants, at one stroke, out of their brickyards and quarries and from the scaffoldings of their new palaces. It is an instance of the providence of God which grows upon one, the more he studies it : that God should have made His own enemies train His servant, and that through so many years.

Then, as we pass on, we see the life of Moses still directed by God. He came to manhood a genuine Hebrew, though reared in an Egyptian palace. He went out among his enslaved people. He saw how they were oppressed. His Hebrew heart waxed hot

within him as he beheld a taskmaster smiting one of his brethren, and, in his anger, he smote the oppressor and killed him. That act was his own; the act of his own fiery zeal. It was not God's bidding; and Moses showed in this that he could not yet rule himself, and was not therefore yet fit for leadership; and so God took him in hand at once. He must go away where that fiery spirit could be tamed; and the rocky solitude of Horeb was a good place, and keeping sheep a good occupation to foster thoughtfulness and self-communion. A great change it was from his honors and congenial studies to the dull routine of a shepherd's life among the Arabian mountains; and Moses was only human, and he was lonely and sad sometimes. You catch a glimpse of this in the name which he gave his first-born son, "Gershom," banishment, "for I have been a stranger in a strange land." Then, at last, when the time was ripe, God gave him his commission. It had taken a long time, forty years of solitude, but the work was thoroughly done, and he should never know solitude any more—no, not even its sweet refreshment, until forty years later, when he should have a few blessed hours of the old mountain stillness alone with God ere God took him.<sup>1</sup> Like many another great man, when the time for his great life-work had come, he found his mission in the track of his daily task. God spoke to him out of one of the common thorn-bushes in the mountain pas-

---

<sup>1</sup> It will be remembered how beautifully this thought is treated by Ruskin in his chapter on "the mountain glory." "Modern Painters," vol. v.

tures, and sent him back to Egypt and to Pharaoh to deliver his people. I need not go on with the story. From this time, until the hour when, amid the sound of a nation's weeping, he went up Nebo to die, you all know Moses as God's chosen agent, carrying out God's will, "faithful in all his house as a servant." The life, I repeat, was continuously under God's direction. The same hand which took up the infant in the bulrush ark, and led him first into the palace of the Pharaohs, and then into the solitudes of the Arabian desert, guided him through his last forty, care-burdened years, and took him at last to Himself, and made his grave with His own hands, no man knoweth where to this day.

And all this, I repeat, grew out of the original act of his parents in committing him to God. That act was an act of faith, and, as a consequence, Moses' life was a life of faith. Faith spans this life of the Hebrew lawgiver, from the bulrush ark to Pisgah.

Let us look at some illustrations of this fact, as they are specified in the text. By faith he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

I have already spoken of the probability that Moses, thrown at so early an age into the Egyptian court, and graced with all the advantages which royal favor could give, would become attached to his benefactors and to his princely life. He would have been more than human if this had not been the case. Then, consider his prospects: wealth, power, leisure for study, association with the learned, honors of all kinds. It would have been strange, indeed, if these had not

presented a strong attraction for him. Again, look at the alternative as between this princely life and the life among a degraded, subject race, ignorant of even ordinary decencies ; a lot which would make his former patrons his enemies, and which would insure him toil, vexation, and pain, for the whole remainder of his life. Every day, almost, we see fanatics doing strange things and things hurtful to themselves. But Moses was not a fanatic. He was a wise man, as worldly men count wisdom. He knew, as well as any sage in Egypt, how chimerical, how hopeless, from the stand-point of worldly prudence, such a movement as the migration of the Israelites was. If he saw the matter from God's point of view, he was also quite competent to see it from Pharaoh's.

And yet he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He renounced his royal adoption, with all its honors and privileges, and took up with his nation's hard lot. On any worldly basis of reasoning it is very hard to account for this choice. Scripture makes no difficulty in accounting for it. Our writer here says that the same faith which made his parents hide his infancy, moved his manhood to choose the harder instead of the easier lot ; affliction with the people of God, rather than the pleasures of sin ; the reproach of Christ rather than the treasures of Egypt ; the unseen divine recompense, rather than the honors of royalty. Moreover, you perceive that this same faith gave him an insight into the sin which underlay much of the pleasure by which he was surrounded, and in which he would naturally have participated.



Youth is generally wont to accept the pleasures which offer themselves, without much thought as to their tendency or their bearing upon character. Faith, it would seem, gave Moses a right discernment in this matter. Then, too, youth naturally thinks that its pleasure will last. Its life seems too bright ever to fade. This same discernment of faith enabled Moses to see that pleasure, and especially sinful pleasure, is short lived. Again, it is not natural for men to count reproach as riches. The natural mind does not at all accept nor understand the Saviour's words, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." It is a clear and marked token of the power of faith in Moses, that he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt.

Again, you observe, that faith wrought courage in Moses. As we are told that his parents, through their faith, were not afraid of the king's commandment, so we read that Moses forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king. There were two ways in which this wrath might work harm. If he were detected in his flight, he might suffer personally, be degraded from his honors, and perhaps pay the penalty of his life. If he were not detected, Pharaoh might revenge himself upon the helpless people whose cause Moses had made his own, and thus strike him through them. The contemplation of both these dangers required faith; and Moses displayed it, both in commending himself and his oppressed people to God's care and protection.

“He endured, as seeing the invisible.” In those words the very essence of faith is stated. “Faith,” as the writer of this very epistle puts it, “is the evidence of things not seen ;” and yet I cannot help thinking that a reference lay in the author’s mind to the contrast of Moses’ simple faith in the one invisible God, with the Egyptians’ belief in their three orders of gods, and their worship of inanimate nature. From infancy Moses’ eyes had been familiar with the sacred bulls and goats and cats ; with the stone images of hawk or lion-headed deities ; with the worship of the sun, and with the reverence paid to the mummied crocodile ; and yet out of all this gross idolatry he had come with a faith in the one invisible Jehovah ; a practical faith, too, as in one to whom he could appeal with confidence in the great crisis of his life ; from whom he was to receive the law of his life, and whose unseen, future recompense he preferred to all the honors of this world.

And you observe, farther, that this faith was vindicated in the position, the character, and the power of Moses. No man ever held a position involving more labor and care and responsibility, and for that very reason, none but a man of faith could ever have held it successfully. The burden was too heavy for any man’s shoulders ; and the secret of Moses’ successful administration of forty years lay simply in the faith which threw the burden upon God. However great may have been his natural talents, however extensive his learning, he occupies his place in history, not because of these, but because he was a man of faith.



The wonderful deeds with which his name is associated, like the passing of the Red Sea, do not suggest him so much as they do God. "By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land." When God gave back to Moses his shepherd's staff on Horeb, the rod had become a wonder-working instrument. In Moses' hand it had been but a stick. Having passed through God's hand it took on God's power; and so long as faith maintained the connection between God and his servant, so long that rod had power over the pestilence, the hail and the fire, the sea, and the rock.

Faith, then, was the basis of this life, both in its unconscious and in its self-determining stage; and the faith of the first stage is carried on into the second, and gives it its character and its success.

And now I ask if this truth belongs only to remote ages and characters like those of Moses? Is it not equally a truth of the development of the Christian child into the Christian man or woman?

Childhood and maturity can no more be in two pieces than the roots and the trunk of a tree. You might just as well expect the roots of an oak to begin to develop into a strawberry vine the moment the shoot came above ground, as to expect that maturity is going to develop something quite distinct from the character and influences of the childhood. The character of the underground stage of the life—to carry out the figure—while the child is yet hidden away in the bosom of the household, will show itself when the man and the woman emerge into society as active forces. "Train up a child in the way he should go,

and when he is old he will not depart from it." We say it is only a proverb: granted; but need it be any less a truth for that reason? Is it not a truth which we recognize everywhere else? Do we expect a tree to grow straight which we suffer as a twig to grow crooked? So it will be true that if faith is the master motive of the parents' life, if faith controls the earlier training of the child, if faith inspires the parental longings and the parental discipline, faith will perpetuate itself in the maturer life of the son or daughter.

Faith in God I mean, not faith in human nature. The human nature of men and women does not encourage our faith in it. Why then should we think Solomon antiquated when he says: "foolishness is bound in the heart of a child?" Do not let us be deceived by any of the modern sentimentalism about the child being suffered to unfold his own individuality without hindrance, as if childhood were of itself so beautiful and perfect a thing that to meddle with it were to mar it. Moses was beautiful unto God, divinely fair, and in his beauty and other natural gifts lay the special reason for his training for God's uses and by God's hand. The more promise our children reveal, the stronger individuality, the greater reason that God's hand should be upon that life from the very beginning. Our children must not be left to think their own thoughts, to develop their own principles, to mould their own conscience, without any bridle upon their natural impulses. "This kind of nurture assumes, that human children will grow up,

left to themselves, into the most genuine, highest style of human character; whereas . . . what they most especially want is . . . to be preoccupied with holy principles and laws; to have prejudices instilled that are holy prejudices; and so to be tempered beforehand by moderating and guiding influences, such as their perilous freedom and hereditary damage require.”<sup>1</sup>

And the Christian faith of parents embraces not only God and Christ, but the church of Christ. If parental training includes Christ, it cannot exclude the church, for Christ and his church go together. Parents recognize society as one of the primary forces in the training of their children; and Christian parents can surely desire for their children no less than that their society should be Christian; that the social influences, which go so far to mould them, should be sanctified. For this reason the Christian economy associates the child's infancy with the church of the living God, as the Jewish economy did. It assumes that the child of a Christian believer is born a member of a Christian society. It guards the social influences of its very infancy, and there in the church, where the parents' faith is professed, where the parents' sanctified energy is marshalled for Christian service, where the parents' Christian culture is so largely given, where the parents find so many of their best and purest associations, there the lot of the child is intended to be cast, and its society and its privileges

---

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Horace Bushnell, “Christian Nurture.”

are to be offered to him habitually as his birthright. And thus we say, in our confession of faith: "The visible church consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children;" and again, "Children born within the pale of the visible church, and dedicated to God in baptism, are under the inspection and government of the church."

The practical lesson, therefore, is two-fold. It is, first, to parents. Our children come into the world to meet an edict as cruel and destructive as was Pharaoh's. It is the malignant will of the great enemy of souls, speaking through the fashion of this world, and decreeing the ruin of their souls. It is not for us to fear this king's commandment. We must meet it with faith, hiding our children in the covenant of God, and watching them with prayer. Faith must launch their infant life. Our faith and our application of it to our children's lives has everything to do with their future. Until they can exercise intelligent faith for themselves we must bring to bear on them the powers and the principles of the life of faith. We all want their maturer life to be a life of faith. Why, then, is it so often overlooked that, to this end, faith must work in their earlier life? Oh, it is all wrong when Christian parents look upon this first life as something which is to have its own bent, and is only to be transformed into something else by a shock or a crisis, by powerful preaching or revival by and by. In accepting that theory they are throwing away their own and the child's best opportunity, and are leaving to

uncertain forces, in the future, that which is very largely in their own hands in the present. It is true that our children's hearts must be changed ; but change of heart is the work of God's spirit—an inward, secret work—and it is by no means needful that we should know when it takes place. Train up your child in the atmosphere of faith and prayer, in the circle of Christ's church ; train him to recognize and to claim his birthright privilege as a member of Christ's church, and he will grow up sweetly and naturally into faith and love, and escape the terrible shock by which a mature life is wrenched from the world and given to Christ.

And the appeal is, secondly, to the children and youth. Dear children, I speak to you as children of the church. You early learned the story of this Moses, the man of God, and early learned to admire and to revere him. Remember, the secret of his greatness was his goodness ; and the secret of his goodness was faith in God ; and this faith did not come first in his latter years, but began when he was a child, and kept him from the sin which was all round him. And it was this same faith which made Pharaoh tremble, which brought darkness and fire on the land of Egypt, which divided the Red Sea, which took him up into the mountain to see God's glory, and sent him down with his face shining with the light of heaven, which made a whole great nation lean on him and trust him as a father and friend, and fill the desert with the sound of their weeping when he went up to die. Children, if you expect to be good

and useful men and women, you must begin the work here and now. Do not think that your manhood and womanhood will be something good, and pure, and true, if your childhood and youth are not so. Do not think that faith in God and in Christ will come into your later life as a matter of course, even though you give them no place in your earlier life. God calls you now. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Christ calls even to the youngest of you: "Suffer the little children to come unto me." And your parents have prayed for you. They gave you to God in baptism. You are to-day within Christ's church, and Christ and the holy angels and the church are waiting and longing to have you confess your Lord and Master, and to sit down with the church at His table.

Our standards say, concerning the children of believers, "when they come to years of discretion, if they be free from scandal, appear sober and steady, and to have sufficient knowledge to discern the Lord's body, they ought to be informed it is their duty and their privilege to come to the Lord's Supper." It seems to me that this provision falls in so beautifully with the gospel idea of the family of God, and is so beautifully illustrated in our family life. It is a little epoch in the family history, when the babe gets old enough to come to the family table. You know what a rejoicing there is, when the little one is first perched in its high chair at the mother's side. And yet we do not count it a strange or an unnatural thing that the child should appear at the family board. We are



not tempted to keep it away year after year until we are quite sure it will behave itself. Oh, parents, Christian parents, is our Father's house any less the children's house than ours? Is the bread of the Father's table not the children's bread? and shall we any the less rejoice to see them sitting with us at Christ's board than at our own? God help us to set the seal of faith on their earlier years, that their life may be crowned at last with God's own recompense of reward.





THE DIVINE LAW OF EDUCA-  
TION.

DEUTERONOMY XXXII.

- (10) He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness ; He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of his eye.
- (11) As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings ;
- (12) So the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.

## X.

### THE DIVINE LAW OF EDUCATION.

Most of you have seen those little toys, in the end of which is inserted a minute magnifying-glass, through which one may distinctly see the picture of some familiar scene. The grandest landscape is thus brought by the photographer within a space not much larger than a pin-head.

So God constantly reproduces the great outlines of natural life in individual experience. Nations and men pass through the same stages. The great features of the process by which God develops them are the same; and especially is this true of a nation like Israel, whose development was pre-eminently moral and religious. The Christian, who reviews intelligently his own life, will find himself retracing the outlines of the chosen people's history. Bondage, deliverance by divine power, guidance, discipline, lapses into idolatry, frettings and murmurs, chastisements, entrance upon a promised land, fighting with its old tenants, growing compactness and stability, all these and many more, he will find reproduced in his own spiritual record.

Our text contains a lesson of this character. It forms a part of that memorable farewell address of

Moses to the children of Israel, ere he went up the mountain to die. In themselves, the words are merely a review of God's mercies to His people throughout the most critical period of their history: yet, with New Testament light shining through them, they mean to us something more. Whether they were intended to do so or not, these verses wonderfully illustrate and foreshadow certain great features of God's process in educating a Christian in the divine life.

And first, "He found Israel in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness." Moses does not mean to imply by this that God's care for His people began in the Arabian desert. The description is figurative, and covers their residence in Egypt, where their deliverance began. This was, indeed, as a waste of howling beasts. What condition can be imagined more pitiable than that of a nation of slaves under an Oriental tyrant? It was not only that their time and strength were not their own; not only that their children were murdered at the tyrant's whim; not only that the lash of the taskmaster added terror to their intolerable labors; those things, bad as they are, are not the worst of slavery. Worse than all was the imbruting power of bondage; the degradation of manhood; the crushing out of aspiration; the making them satisfied with the pleasures of the beast, and ignorant of any higher pleasures. That is a truth which ought to be very plain to us. That was just the result which our national sin brought to pass; and the brute bulk which we nurtured for so many years, is on our hands to-day, complicating our politics,

and tormenting us with its ignorance and helplessness.

In this condition then, this wilderness of tyranny, ignorance, superstition, bereft of comfort and of hope, God found this rabble of slaves. With this unpromising material He undertook to make a nation and a new civilization. And truly it seems as if God delighted in taking the worst possible subjects in which to display His saving power. It is the truth set forth in the prophet's vision—the fair mitre and the clean robe put upon the arraigned prisoner, whom God Himself calls “a brand plucked from the fire.” As between two men, we not unfrequently see God choose the most unpromising. Take, for example, the father of this very nation, Jacob. God's choice lights on him rather than on Esau ; on the younger, rather than on the elder. And yet Esau really appeals to us as the nobler character of the two. He is the more frank, manly, generous nature ; Jacob is full of low cunning ; the characteristics which to-day are most offensive in his race, are sharply developed in him ; and yet Esau goes away to Edom and drops out of history, while Jacob wins the name and the power of a prince of God, and will be a leading factor in the history of the human race to the end of time. Why go to the slave huts for a new nation, when palace and temple and obelisk, hieroglyph and parchment told of a civilization ready made, of a cultured race, and of a venerable wisdom ? It is not for us to say. We know the fact. And, what is better, we see the fact repeated in the economy of Christ. He comes, pro-

claiming that his work lies in the desert ; that his sphere is down among the poor and sorrowful ; that his call is to sinners and not to the righteous ; that his search is for the lost ; that he, in short, will take up what every one else casts aside ; what the wisdom of the world despises ; what the sanctity of the world refuses to touch ; what the charity of the world excludes ; what the world's refinement shrinks from ; that he will seek in its deserts, that he will find, that he will choose and justify and glorify, and make to sit with him in heavenly places. And let us not deceive ourselves by thinking that a cultivated and moral man who becomes a subject of Christ's saving grace, is any exception to this rule ; that when Christ seeks and finds him, he finds him anywhere but in a waste howling wilderness. The wilderness is where Christ is not. Men may live there and make gardens in the sand, and dig wells ; but the tree of life does not grow there, and the deepest wells do not yield living water. And when a man once reaches a clear consciousness of what sin is, what divine love is, what a sinner is, the most cultured man will be constrained to confess that Christ found him as a dweller in the wilderness. It is noteworthy how that sentiment breaks up at intervals through Paul's close logic and impassioned eloquence. So far from feeling that he has conferred a favor on the gospel by coming to its aid with all his wealth of learning and intellect, he regards it as one of the greatest of marvels that Christ should give him a place among its preachers. He goes back with a groan to the old days, and says,



“I persecuted the church.” “I scourged men and women.” “I made them deny the faith.” “I am not meet to be an apostle.” “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” No, sin is not the difference between ignorance and culture, between legal morality and crime. It is the difference between a subject and an outlaw, a servant of Satan and a friend of God, a desert and a paradise.

But having once delivered Israel from its taskmasters, the work was but begun. The people had well-nigh everything to learn. They knew little or nothing of law, of religion, of self-government, even of ordinary decencies. Look at this rabble, and then at God's ideal as it afterward came into shape; of a nation with laws, arts, literature, military institutions, and religion overarching and penetrating all, and what a task is this. So, having found Israel in this howling wilderness, He must needs instruct him. How wonderfully He did it, with how much tact and patience and delicacy, with how much wisdom and forbearance, we all know, but it took a long, long time.

And so, to turn to the Christian application of the truth, no conception of Christian experience is complete which omits this idea of instruction. I do not mean merely teaching; I mean rather the result of teaching; what is implied in the word “instruction” itself; building, furnishing, developing manhood on every side, and in its completeness in Christ Jesus.

Now, unquestionably, this process of instruction must have a beginning ; and that beginning is conversion. There was a time when the Israelites passed from Egypt and from Pharaoh's power ; so there is a time when a man receives a new heart, when he changes his allegiance ; goes out from the service of his old master, and enlists with a new one. Sometimes this change involves a sudden, startling experience, sometimes it does not. There are children educated under such influences, as that they expand like a flower into Christian faith and love, and cannot remember a time when they did not love Christ. There are men and women who pass by a gradual transition from darkness and sorrow into clear-seeing faith and Christian peace. These are only phases of the one fact. There is a starting-point, a conversion, a passing from death unto life. But no sane man could fail to see that when Israel had passed out of Egypt, the work was but just begun. If merely their oppressors had been destroyed, and they set free and left to themselves, it is quite certain that they would have brought themselves into a much worse condition than that in which Pharaoh left them. You give a lad who does not know a hand-saw from a chisel a chest of tools, and leave him entirely to himself, and he will spoil good wood, and spoil his tools, and cut himself terribly besides. Give a nation or a man freedom, and nothing else, and the last state will be worse than the first. There is no such terrible slavery in the world as liberty without law. Similarly, let a man be converted and then left

to himself to work out his own salvation without God working in him, and he might about as well not have been converted. That was the reason why Christ laid so much stress on the *keeping* of his disciples, and prayed, "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me. Sanctify them through thy truth." And in gospel salvation the two things go together—conversion and training. They cannot be separated. They are one purpose of God. When you take a poor ragged boy out of the street, and promise that you will be a father and protector to him henceforth, you do not merely bring him to your house, bid the servant take him to the kitchen and feed him, and give yourself no farther thought about him. Adopting him as your child is not merely taking him out of the street. If he is to become your son, he must not remain a vagabond. So, when God calls a man, He proposes to do for and in him all that is involved in making him a son of God; not only to forgive his sins, and adopt him as His child, but to train him as an heir of eternal glory. But it takes time to do this work.

Thus, then, I repeat, salvation, life in Christ's kingdom, begins in conversion; but it only begins. One goes to school to Christ, but he is not educated on entering the school-room. One becomes a soldier of Christ, but he is none the less a blundering, awkward recruit after he has enlisted. That common and most pernicious phrase "*getting religion*," carries with it to popular thought the idea of a work done in a moment, once for all, leaving nothing to be done more.

But religion embraces the whole range of a man's relations to God. It is not exhausted in a single experience. It is commensurate not only with his natural life, but with his immortal life. He will be "experiencing religion" forever, as eternity shall reveal more of God. And when he enters Christ's kingdom for the first time, he is a little child, not only in humility, but in experience; a babe in Christ. Did you ever think how much there is in that phrase, "a babe in Christ?" Look at a babe in a loving household, compassed about with love, with prudence, with care and wisdom, with all manner of appliances to make him strong and upright and learned, and yet how ignorant of it all. How much he has to learn of his own privileges, powers, and responsibilities. How little he knows of the power and preciousness of the love which encircles him. Take the most cultivated man into the Kingdom of God, and he is a babe, veritably. He is in Christ, Christ's love all round him. Christ's power all round him, Christ's wisdom all round him, and he with but the smallest practical experience of their infinite resources. He has entered a new realm, where unseen things are the great things; where faith is a power of the first class; where things are on a larger scale and move in vaster orbits; and this man, fresh from a realm of sight and skepticism and selfishness, is not at home at once. He has everything to learn. He is changed, in that he has now the spirit of a disciple, the humility and simplicity of the asking child; but he understands now why asking, seeking, and knocking enter

so largely into the life of the heavenly kingdom. He does not at once walk stoutly and confidently by faith. He has been too long walking by sight. He does not readily obey without question. He has been too long used to obey only when he saw good reason for it. He does not at once learn the permanency of the unseen as compared with the seen. He is not a perfect man, he is only striving to become such. He is not out of the reach of doubt or fear or sin, though he is vigorously fighting them all. He forgets his divine friend sometimes, just as did the Israelites. He murmurs sometimes, just as they did. He desponds, as they did. He is tempted by his old idols, as they were. And the raising up of the new man in him, the developing him from a babe in Christ to a man strong in faith, sublime in unselfishness, wary and victorious in temptation, ripe in charity, is a work covering his entire life, from the time when he puts his hand in his Saviour's, until the moment when he says, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." All through that time he is learning, compacting, growing, through the agency of teaching, trial, defeat and victory, joy and sorrow, study of the word, prayer, Christian practice; learning his own weakness, learning Christ's resources, learning Satan's subtlety and power, growing up into Christ his living head in all things.

One of the stubborn facts, therefore, which has to be confronted in the kingdom of grace, is imperfect Christians. It is a fact on which the world, outside that kingdom, either through ignorance or per-

verseness, persists in putting its own damaging construction ; and as it never sees a Christian who is perfect, its sweeping inference is that the heavenly kingdom is no better than the earthly. And this is the subterfuge behind which hundreds of men are taking refuge to-day from the claims of Christianity. "I do not believe in it. Look at its professors." The truth that the kingdom of grace is a training-school, and not an academy of saints, is one which such men seem incapable of grasping ; and yet I might as reasonably go into yonder school-room to-morrow, and denounce the school and its teachers as humbugs because the pupils were not mathematicians like Newton, or linguists like Müller, as to abuse Christianity because its disciples are imperfect. The truth is that this kind of judgment, which pretends to a very profound moral insight, is really very shallow. Perfection always looks easy. From seeing a thing done easily, certain people conclude that it is easy to do. It looks very easy as that masterly musician runs his fingers over the keys. It looks very easy as the painter lays the colors on the canvas ; but only when you attempt the same thing do you begin to realize how many weary years of drudgery and discipline lie behind that easy deftness. It requires not a little knowledge to know the difficulties of perfection ; and if men had a deeper moral insight, if they knew more of the perfection of Christ's manhood, they would have a deeper sympathy with the slow progress which their earnest but erring brother makes toward it. I remember one day going into a great bronze foundry,



where some of the masterpieces of modern art are cast; and the workmen were busy preparing the moulds for the statue of an American statesman. And it would be hard to find uglier things than those moulds, or a process more strange and bewildering to a novice. I could not recognize, in those masses of clay, the outlines of the symmetrical model I had seen in the exhibition room. But the master saw them. Through all the dirt and confusion, through all those strange shapes in the clay, yea, through the tossing and seething of the boiling mass in the furnace, he saw that thing of beauty which should greet the eye when the furnace should have been emptied and the mould knocked away. So one who himself knows somewhat of Christian discipline and of Christian growth, sees something taking shape under and through the mingled elements of his brother's Christian career. There is much clay and sand, much boiling and stirring, much unshapeliness; but he knows that the master is shaping a man in Christ Jesus through it all; that under his touch the life is slowly working its way out into light, symmetry, and clearness; and that one day, after long years of God's wondrous patience, the fleshly mould shall drop away, and the new creature in Christ Jesus stand forth perfected in the light of heaven, unto praise and honor and glory of Christ his redeemer.

And young Christians need to grasp this truth: One of the greatest obstacles in their career is likely to be their comparison of themselves with older and more experienced Christians, either as they see them



or read about them. They too often put themselves under a course of memoirs of eminent saints or of precocious Christians ; and with a most pernicious result to their own Christian peace and growth ; since they lose sight, in most cases, of this idea of being at school, and become discouraged because the rich fruits of matured faith and saintly heroism do not appear in themselves. Such literature has a real and a permanent value ; but it wants some wisdom to read it to profit. If Professor Tyndall or Professor Huxley should go into that scientific school where a dozen lads were beginning the study of chemistry, and their teachers should tell them of the scientific achievements of these men, the legitimate result would be to make them bend more vigorously to their present study. The effect upon one morbid mind of the dozen might be to make him throw down his book and turn away from his retorts, saying : " I am not like these men, it is useless for me to study more ; I am discouraged." The proper answer of course would be : " You are not here as a chemist, but as a student of chemistry." But you see the point of the illustration as applied to a young Christian. The thing for him to keep in mind is, you are a disciple, a pupil. Take up your life and teaching as God gives it to you daily. Keep close to your divine Teacher. Do the task He sets you, and let the experience of maturer Christians alone. If their excellencies excite your admiration and desire, remember that that boy becomes the best developed man who best lives out the life of his childhood, and does

not try to be a man before his time. The range of your experience is narrower ; see to it only that you gain and do all that is within your range. Let Christ work out what he will, in his own way, in the sphere of your Christian pupilage. He will not go too fast, nor too slow ; but if you obediently and trustfully follow him, he will bring you "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

When God delivered Israel, He designed to make of them a peculiar people. He was going to develop a civilization unlike any that the world had ever seen ; and this was not to be done in Egypt. He must get them away from the contact of that old, idolatrous nation, and train them by themselves. And so He dealt with them as the eagle with her young, when the time comes for them to learn to fly. Their true element, little as they think it, is the air ; and they can never learn to be at home in its boundless fields, so long as they remain in the snug nest. So she stirs up her nest, drives them out, pushes them into the air ; yet all the while is ready, if the timid pinions fail, to drop beneath, and to receive them on her wings. Thus God drove Israel out into the wilderness into a new and strange life ; a life at which they now and then rebelled, and from which, in their worst moments, they looked longingly back to the animal comforts of the old slave nest in Egypt. But in the new and untried sphere God never left them. He bare them as on eagle wings. In their weakness and inexperience, He kept them as the apple of the eye. The

divided sea, the smitten rock, the manna, the pillar of cloud and of fire, all were tokens of His presence and care. And, similarly, the inauguration of a Christian experience is the inauguration of a new life. A man moves out into a new element. Walking by faith instead of by sight is a good deal what trying to fly is to the young eaglet. He shrinks from it. He looks longingly back at the nest. And hence this complete change of spheres, this detachment from old formulas of thought, old habits of life, old desires, old principles of actions, old aims, is a literal stirring up of the nest. God wants him where He *alone* can lead him.

And within the sphere of this general experience there will be a good many special experiences, tending the same way, to develop the man's own individual character by contact with God. Oh, there is a wonderful depth and pregnancy in that thought, "The Lord alone did lead him." Will Christians ever fairly get hold of that thought that God is their teacher, and that they are to be not what society would make them, nor what family tradition would make them, nor what self-interest would make them, nor even what they see other Christians to be, but just themselves, their own selves, remoulded by the power of Christ, and developed into such phases of manhood as God shall select for them? So, young man, you thought, it may be, that with your liberal education, you would grace the bar, or adorn the annals of literature. You were building a beautiful nest, and settling down with cheerful content, and, mayhap God stirred up your nest, broke up your plan, and launch-

ed you forth into that grander field from which your untried powers shrank, in which more than in any other you should daily feel the need of a power not your own—the preaching of the unsearchable riches of Christ. Oh, that God would stir up scores of nests, and send their inmates forth into that sphere. Or it may be you had mapped out a wide sphere of usefulness. You were to be active and prominent in public charities and philanthropic movements, and God disarranged all that, and sent you to pass long years by a sick-bed, and in daily, petty ministries which required only patience and sweetness. You thought God was narrowing your sphere; but narrow and wide do not mean to Him always what they do to us. If you went into that life obediently, the Lord alone leading you, you came nearer to God in that sphere than in any other; and any sphere in which you walk with God is wide enough for you. The difference between a Christian in a wide and in a narrow sphere, is sometimes the difference between a lake and an artesian well. The one covers more surface, but the other goes down deeper. Again, I say, wide or narrow, are matters of little consequence. The great thing is that in your sphere of life the Lord alone lead you, and that there be no strange god with you. If he takes you out into the desert alone with Him, have you lost anything? In the more busy and populous and stirring life, all came from Him; and having Him, have you not all, just as much as before?

The course of thought leads to two or three practical questions. Has God found you? Are you in the

desert land to-day? Nay, do not evade the question. The desert is where God is not. The far country is anywhere outside your Father's house. Anywhere where you are living without faith and hope in Jesus Christ is desert ground. There are no living springs there. There are powers of evil that hunger for your soul. There grows no fruit there that will nourish you into a noble manhood after Christ's pattern. Has God found you? He is seeking you I know. The prints of His footsteps are all over those barren sands, and by the brink of those shallow wells you have dug with so much toil. Go there some day when the sun beats fiercely on your head, and you are tired and thirsty and heartsick, and you shall find one sitting there in the guise of him who talked with the Samaritan, and who will talk with you, and tell you too of living water. Or is it true that you have heard His voice many times, and, like Adam, are still hiding from His face—afraid to meet Him lest He should stir up your nest in the desert?

Is God your guide? Have you put yourself, in good faith, under God's instruction? Then, Christian, why this hot, hasty, feverish life, this constant anxiety to be or to do something else? "Aspiration," you say. Must I not strive for that which is before? Yea, verily, but all the while "*looking unto Jesus.*" Aspiration is not fretting, not anxiety, not trouble. You shall realize your aspiration best and soonest by walking with Christ, at his rate, doing his will daily, and communing with him as you walk. Paul did indeed press toward the mark for the prize

of his high calling. No man ever had a higher ideal ; but it was all "in Christ Jesus," the pressing on as well as the ideal.

And do you realize how much peace and comfort there is for you in the fact of God's keeping? "He kept him as the apple of his eye." Oh, what tenderness, what delicate, watchful care there is set forth in that figure. The apple of the eye—the most exquisite, the most sensitive part of the human frame—suffering from the touch of the smallest mote ; yet God keeps you as you keep that. In your ignorance and in your blundering, in your weakness and in your danger, He keeps you. Need you be sorry any more? Have you any better refuge in earth or heaven than this? Have you aught else to do in this world of care and sin, but to draw ever closer to His side, and gratefully and trustingly do the day's work in the day, sure that the eternal God is your refuge, that underneath are the everlasting arms ; and that as He will guide you by His counsel, so He will afterwards receive you to glory?





GOOD AND BAD BUILDING ON  
THE ONE FOUNDATION.

### 1 CORINTHIANS III.

- (10) According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.
- (11) For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
- (12) Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble ;
- (13) Every man's work shall be made manifest : for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire ; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.
- (14) If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.
- (15) If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss : but he himself shall be saved ; yet so as by fire.

## XI.

### GOOD AND BAD BUILDING ON THE ONE FOUNDATION.

WE are looking through these verses into the Corinthian church of the first Christian century. It is not a pleasing picture. Riot at sacred feasts, gross sin tolerated, endless disputations over meat offered to idols, bitter partisanship centring in favorite ministers, awaken our disgust. Yet neither is it a picture adapted to flatter the self-complacency of the modern church. We are not altogether unlike. Some at least of these old abuses repeat themselves, and make Paul's keen admonitions as fitting now as then.

No one, for instance, need ask for a better description of the church in New York (not to go farther), than is given in this chapter; the church divided into parties, each with the name of its favorite minister for a watchword. One saith, "I am of Paul," another, "I am of Apollos," another, "I am of Peter." Substitute other names for these, and you have the picture faithfully reproduced in our own community.

Against this error Paul puts forward God in Christ, as the proper centre of the church's interest and zeal. Ministers, he says, are only servants, as their name

implies, receiving from God everything which endears or makes them useful to His people. They have different gifts and different offices. One plants, another waters, but the increase, the fruit of their labor, is from God only. "Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase." He that planteth and he that watereth are not two, doing two works, heading two parties, they are one; fellow-workers under God. And in reading the ninth verse in the original, you will observe how the word God is emphasized. "For of *God* are we fellow laborers: of *God* are ye the husbandry: of *God* are ye the building." Each congregation is not a field of its own, cultivated by its own minister. Ye are *God's* husbandry, not Paul's nor Peter's. We are not building up each a sect for himself. Ye are *God's* building.

We are prepared, therefore, for the following statement: The foundation of Christian teaching is not in man; it is not Paul, nor Apollos, nor any system or philosophy of theirs. It is Jesus Christ. Other foundation can no man lay. "If," says Paul, in effect, "I have laid the foundation of the church, it has been only as God's agent, presenting to you Christ and him crucified as the basis of your church life, the starting-point of the instructions of all who shall succeed me."

It is not my purpose, however, to dwell upon this foundation truth, but to follow the apostle in the line of thought which he draws from it. The text refers directly to Christian ministers; but its application

need not be confined to them, since every Christian is, in his own sphere, a builder or a worker for God.

The matter of the foundation, then, is settled. There is but one basis of Christian life, Christian work, and Christian teaching. But the foundation is not an end unto itself. It implies a building; and the building as well as the foundation is to be the object of care to the Christian. "Let every man take heed *how* he buildeth thereupon." It is indispensable that a man should begin his religious life with the right principle; but it is likewise important that he should carry out his principle in the right way. A bank clerk may perfectly understand the principles of book-keeping, and the rules of arithmetic, yet through carelessness may make a mistake, which shall render a balance impossible, and keep him hunting half the night for his error. It is distinctly implied here that even on so secure a foundation as Jesus Christ it is possible to build work or teaching which will not stand the final and decisive test of the judgment-day.

It is evident from the apostle's words that a great variety of building on this foundation is contemplated. It is of different qualities, represented by different materials: some permanent and precious, as gold, silver, jewels; others perishable, like wood, hay, stubble. This, which appears here in figure, is a fact of experience to all of us. We see the great variety of teaching, of methods, of types of character, which the Christian church represents. In preaching we have

Paul's kindled logic and pungent appeal, Apollos' graceful rhetoric, and Peter's straightforward simplicity, all reproduced, with infinite varieties, in the modern pulpit. One deals more with the intellect, another more with the heart. One deals with the skeleton of truth, another clothes it with flesh and blood. One dwells more on the doctrinal, another on the historical and poetical parts of the Scripture. One deduces from it one scheme of theology, another another. One man's preaching is solid, scriptural, full of the jewels of truth ; another's is largely mixed with rant and fustian, betraying hasty and superficial study of the word. There is the simple freedman with little beside his experimental knowledge of Christ, who finds in a text the expression of some quaint conceit of his own, and expounds it with unctio to his unlettered brethren. And there is the reformer who practically regards the whole Bible as written to enforce his peculiar hobby, and who interprets it accordingly.

Or, take the matter of commenting on the Scriptures. Here, too, the work of the various builders differs. Here is one who looks upon a portion of Scripture as a mosaic composed of a multitude of pieces, each piece precious ; and he takes a Psalm or a gospel chapter, and examines every piece as with a microscope, and finds a meaning in every word and in every shade of mood or tense. Another, like a quarry-man, finds the great lines of cleavage, and cuts along those, and treats the Bible broadly with reference to its great salient truths. One allegorizes

Scripture, finding in every narrative a hidden spiritual or doctrinal sense. This tendency is very manifest in our own day, in the way in which a certain class of teachers interpret the details of the Mosaic ritual and of the tabernacle furniture. Others, again, like the vast army of modern German and English commentators, labor to penetrate to the literal meaning of the text, and bring to its illustration the treasures of historic and linguistic learning, and the results of observant travel.

Or, look at the matter of Christian work. Here, on the one hand, you see Christian zeal taking shape in young men's or young women's Christian associations, or in Sabbath-schools, and mission chapels. On the other hand you have an institution like the Port Royal Monastery, the home of such rare Christlike spirits as St. Cyran, Angelique Arnauld, and the Pascals, yet equally the home of Romish austerities and miracles, and the scene of unnatural seclusion from society. On the one hand, the work of a Presbyterian or Methodist missionary in China or India, translating the Scriptures, setting up printing presses, organizing native churches; on the other the Jesuit missionaries in Northern America in the seventeenth century, carving the name of Jesus on the forest trees as a terror to the demons of the wilderness, rejoicing over the salvation of a soul if they could but touch, by stealth, the brow of a dying infant with baptismal water, and sending home for highly-colored pictures of souls in torment as gifts to the Indians; yet pursuing their work in the face of mutilation and death



with a courage and persistence and devotion unsurpassed in the annals of missions.

So, too, when we come down to individual types of Christian character, we find the variety infinite; the gold of saintliness, the stubble of bigotry, oddities and eccentricities for which it seems as if there were not room on the one foundation; and manhood and womanhood which seems well-nigh of a piece with the foundation itself.

With this recognized fact of the variety of Christian development, the text advances another truth, namely, that each of these forms of development has a value of its own, and that they are not alike valuable, even though they rest on the true foundation; in other words, that a man may be really a Christian, and yet do work which may be described by wood, hay, stubble, and which will not stand the final, fiery test of the last day. It is a not uncommon popular error that all work, done sincerely in Christ's name, deserves approval because of the sincerity of the doer. But that is not the teaching of this passage. How God may turn such work to good, is another and an entirely distinct question. The question here concerns the essential quality of the work. Two teachers interpret Scripture in opposite ways. Both cannot be right, and both may be wrong. Of two sincere Christians we can see for ourselves that one is nobler, sweeter, larger than the other. Of two methods of work, we can see that the one goes farther and deeper than the other. It is a matter of endless surprise what varieties of work and of workmen the gospel

tolerates—incompetent teachers, injudicious reformers, fanatics, and shallow expounders. The final result of this toleration we have nothing to do with. That is God's matter ; but this at least is clear, that God, in tolerating, does not waive the right to judge the work itself, whatever He may do with the workers ; that some of this work done in Christ's name will be summarily condemned ; and that God tells us this truth as a warning to take good heed as to the character of our work and teaching. Sincerity will not destroy the difference between the essential value of different kinds of building. In the great day of judgment, of two equally sincere men, one's work shall stand and the other's shall be burned.

This fact gives tremendous emphasis to the keynote of this passage : "Let every man take heed *how* he buildeth thereupon." *Thereupon*, on that foundation. The foundation alone does not insure good building. When a man is once converted, truly converted, his life resting on Jesus Christ, the only foundation, the necessity for caution does not cease. Now begins the process of developing the highest and best uses of such power as nature or education may have given him ; a process calling for the utmost caution and vigilance and persistence. Now begins the training in duty. Now begins the education of the conscience. Do you think that is a strange statement ? Possibly you do, for it is commonly assumed that conversion sets the conscience, of all other things, right at once ; and we are filled with horror, as if there were something unnatural in the fact, when a recent-

ly converted man or woman walks deliberately into some sin, with no apparent sense of its sinfulness. And yet is it so unnatural after all? I was talking, not many months since, with one of the most experienced and intelligent mission workers in this city, and he said, speaking of some of the degraded people among whom his work lay: "One of the greatest of all the needs which we feel in our work is that of a steady influence to educate the conscience. Those of them who give the best evidence of conversion, will often be found doing shocking things, without seeming to know that they are doing anything out of the way." But you need not go to a New York mission to see that truth illustrated. Paul deals with it in this very Epistle. He devotes a great deal of attention to the weak, uneducated conscience, as a familiar fact in the Christian church. And the sooner a newly converted man can be gotten out of the conceit that conversion sets him right, and all right once for all, and can be made to grasp the fact that he has a building to erect upon his foundation—a structure which involves the right training of his will and conscience, his power to speak and to work, the right casting of his example into a right mould—the better for him, and for those about him.

The Church cannot insist too much upon the one foundation; but she needs to press far more urgently than she has done the caution: "Let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon." We are not to repress men's individuality; we are to take it for granted that, in the infinite variety of God's methods, each

man can find the way of building best adapted to his own powers and qualities. But we are to insist on the truth that men have a duty beyond, and growing out of the duty of being born again ; that they are responsible not merely for being converted, but for the shape which conversion takes in the net result of their lives. Opposed to this is the popular religious sentiment that it matters little how crude a man is and remains, provided he is right at the foundation, sincere and enthusiastic. It does matter greatly. The sincerity is indispensable. The enthusiasm is a heavenly spark which should be kept alive ; but moral building implies character, and character is more than enthusiasm, or sincerity. Salvation is a gift of God, but it is also to be worked out by each man with fear and trembling to carry out the good pleasure of God who worketh in him. The Devil's kingdom is not going to be carried by men's beginning to be Christians, any more than a country is to be captured by any number of soldiers enlisting, or a house to be carried up by merely laying a good foundation. A man must tell positively upon the world, as well as enjoy the raptures of forgiven sin. Under the impulse of his faith and joyful hope, he is to go forward, building prayerfully and heedfully a superstructure of trained character and power, which shall by and by bring the divine reward of good work as well as the saving result of sincere faith.

There has been mischief done under the shelter of the familiar phrase "preaching Christ." A host of plausible crudities and hasty generalizations have found

their way into popular religious teaching under this name. And this fact reaches beyond ministers of the gospel. Every Christian is a builder, every Christian is, in some sense, a teacher. Every Christian does something to shape the life, modify the opinions, and mould the conscience of others ; and, consequently, every man who by teaching or life preaches Christ only as a saviour from sin, and does not farther preach him as a teacher, a guide, a developer of character, a power in Christian growth and culture, who remains standing before the world a forgiven man, and nothing more, preaches him partially, and needs the apostle's caution, "Let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon."

And even in its relation to ministers of the gospel, this truth touches the people at large ; for the people have much to do in shaping their ministers. That there are terrible possibilities in this popular power over the pulpit, you may easily see from that passage in Paul's second Epistle to Timothy : "For the time will come when they will not endure the teaching that is healthful, but, according to their own desires (and the word is almost always used in the New Testament for evil desire) shall they, being tickled in their ears, heap up teachers unto themselves." In other words, a time is predicted when such teachers shall abound, be heaped up ; made by men to suit their own notions, and not anointed by God to declare His mind and will. Too often we have seen that prophecy fulfilled. Too often to-day we hear the people's clamor to have their ears tickled. Too



often we have seen the tragedy of Sinai repeated, the priest making, with his own hands, the gilded idol, for which the multitude cries out, and offering the sacrifice of their idolatry in the very temple of the living God. The fact that such a power exists, that it does now and then prevail to debauch an anointed servant of God, is enough to awaken our vigilance. If the preacher is to heed this admonition to take care how he builds on the foundation, Jesus Christ, the people are equally to take heed that they bring no pressure to bear to divert him from his heedful building, and to urge him to build more showily, more hastily, and more carelessly. We are only too familiar in this city with what comes of running up houses too fast. With all their brave frontage of cut stone and pointed brick, there is an awful crash now and then. We want no gain in the church which comes at the expense of careful building; and it becomes the people not to look to their pastors for weekly entertainment, but, as co-workers with them in building the building of God, to guard their pulpits with prayer, with sympathy, and with intelligence, and to encourage them, in every possible way, to take heed how they build.

But the apostle gives us another thought, lest we should be tempted to identify the final judgment of the worker with the judgment pronounced upon his work. A man's personal relation to Christ is one thing, the essential excellence of his work is another thing. It is true that his work will be affected very decidedly by his relation to Christ, but we are none

the less bidden to hold fast the distinction between these two. No man will be saved *because* of his work. He will be saved only because Jesus Christ gave himself for him. But this work may receive approval nevertheless, and he may get a reward for it, or, on the other hand, his work may be condemned; the material he has used may prove to be no better than hay or stubble, and may be burned, but he himself may be saved. He will suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet saved as by fire, saved as he is who escapes from his burning house, unharmed indeed, but with the loss of all his goods. You may ask me why, if a man rests on the true foundation, his work is not necessarily good. Has not God promised to direct the work of those who trust Him, and will He not make their work right as well as themselves? Yes, that is true, logically; true, scripturally; true, in fact, often enough to substantiate both logic and Scripture; and yet it is also true (who of us does not know it?) that the workers on the great foundation often do not fully know nor use their helps; that they are often slow in learning self-distrust, slow in apprehending the wonderful love of God which is at their disposal; slow in availing themselves of the heavenly wisdom offered for the asking; slow in growing out of their conceit and self-will; and, therefore, much of their work takes its character from these lower and baser conditions, while the new principle of life in them is slowly pushing them upward through these conditions toward something better. Only the better thing may come very late; too late



for the worker to get any reward for his work itself ; yet the sincere believer in Jesus shall not lose his place at his right hand. Your little child comes to you with a few scrawls, by which she has tried to represent a flower or an animal. Her work itself you cannot enjoy nor approve ; you would not frame it and call on your friends to admire it ; it is fit only for the waste basket ; but none the less does the child receive the coveted kiss, and climb into the loved place in your arms when she brings the scrawl.

So long as love does not fail, and faith which works by love, imperfect work will not separate the believer from the love of God in Christ Jesus. But this fact is not intended to weaken the force of the admonition, "Let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon." He who should encourage himself in hasty or superficial work by the consideration that he might be saved though his work should perish, would awaken a very reasonable doubt as to his being on the true foundation at all. And a Christian man ought to be ashamed to live for nothing but his final salvation. Life, though it be short, is rich in opportunities ; it is a seed time for a harvest which other lives may reap. At any rate, these words of the apostle fasten our eyes on this life, brief though it be, and point to our task of building, and bid us take heed to it, and not presume upon final bliss to neglect present duty.

Who that surveys this span of life we tread,  
This narrow isthmus 'twixt two boundless seas—  
The past, the future—two eternities—

Would sully the bright spot or leave it bare,  
When he might build him a proud temple there ?  
A name which long should hallow all its space,  
And be each purer soul's high resting-place.

One thing more remains. The tests of work which we apply here cannot be final. *The day* shall declare it—the day which shall be revealed in fire. Then first we shall fully understand the absolute value of work. We shall doubtless find out then that the great temple of God on the one foundation is a far larger structure than we think, and admits of far greater varieties of work. On the one hand, this text does not convey the comforting doctrine that God will approve all work which men reject. Many a man who has gone grumbling through life because he thought he was unappreciated, will find there that his work did not deserve to be appreciated, and that the destroying fire confirms and emphasizes the judgment of men. But, on the other hand, the text does imply that men's judgment of work may be utterly at fault; and that much which they have mistaken for hay and stubble, may turn out to be gold and silver; and much which they have received as precious stones, prove to be but paste. We are easily misled in this thing. We sometimes think a man's work is poor, because he cannot get other men to accept his ideas and methods. But I am tempted to quote to you just here some words of one of the vigorous thinkers of the English pulpit: "No great man really does his work by imposing his maxims on his disciples. He evokes their life. Correggio cries,

after gazing intently on a picture of Raphael, 'I, too, am a painter,' not one who will imitate the great master, but who will work a way for himself. The pupil may become much wiser than his instructor, he may not accept his conclusions, but he will own, 'you awakened me to be myself, for that I thank you.'"<sup>1</sup>

So a sincere and good man's theories may be wrong ; but he may do his work through the stimulus which his character gives to another man whose character and theories are both right ; and that work will stand. But that is a kind of work which lies under the surface. It is little appreciated here ; but it is preparing a host of surprises for us against the final day of award. And oh, what a collapse of great popular reputations that day will witness ; what a change of places among men who have been leaders in science, in politics, in business, in religion ; what a paling and vanishing of much work whose glitter has dazzled the world ; and what bursting into eternal beauty and glory of the work of many a quiet toiler who took far more heed to the quality of his building than to what men said of it or of him.

We reach, then, some important practical counsels.

1st. Every Christian is responsible for the way in which he makes his life in Christ tell upon the world. His care and watchfulness only begin with the hour of his conversion. Henceforth he owes the world that lesson of healthy, Christian growth, and of true

---

<sup>1</sup> Maurice, "The Conscience."

economy of power, and of labor regulated by heavenly laws, and conducted on divine plans, which he himself can learn only by diligence and faith and prayer and caution. Take heed, Christian, what you build.

2d. Remember that good work shall receive a reward. It will not save you, but it shall be saved and approved in the light of the great day. You and I may be indeed thankful if we be saved as by fire ; if, having done all, we may simply stand ; but, for all that, we should blush to set before us salvation by fire as the goal of our efforts. To do good work, permanent work, is a lawful ambition, which ought never to be wanting to a Christian disciple. Try to fill your days with it. Try to make your lives the scene of the very best building you can do ; building which shall stand and shine forever in the smile of God, when the hay and stubble shall consume in the judgment fire.

3d. Remember, then, that if you honestly strive, and fail, yet Christ remains to you. Only be sure you abide in him. Only be sure the one foundation is under you ; and then, if through sincere mistaking your work be lost, you shall none the less be changed into his image in that realm of clear seeing, from which error shall be forever banished.

CAUTION AND COMFORT FOR  
THE TEMPTED.

1 CORINTHIANS X.

- (12) Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.
- (13) There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man : but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able ; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

## XII.

### CAUTION AND COMFORT FOR THE TEMPTED.

PAUL'S object in citing the history of Israel in this chapter, was the admonition of the Corinthian church. "These things," he says, "happened unto them for ensamples : and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come ;" that is, who are living in the latter days of the world. That people enjoyed great and special privileges, yet they fell into sin, provoked God's displeasure, and died in the wilderness. "Therefore," is the argument, "there is danger that you Christians, with all the great privileges of which you boast in this beautiful and cultivated city of Corinth, may fall into sin as they did, and incur punishment as they did. I, Paul, myself, your teacher, must needs watch and pray, and keep myself in subjection, lest after having preached to others, I should be rejected."

The caution of the text follows naturally from this course of thought : "Wherefore," since there is such danger, "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

In these two verses we may find three truths grouped round the old theme of temptation.



1st. That he whose moral stability seems to be assured by the very best safeguards, is in danger of falling.

2d. That there is nothing in the nature of temptation which necessitates his falling.

3d. That there is everything in the divine ordering of temptation to prevent his falling, and to increase his stability.

First, then, he who seems to himself to be, morally, most secure, is in danger of falling.

There is more than an implication that a man may be mistaken about his security. Not he that standeth, but he that *thinks* he stands is warned to take heed. I believe that if there were any way of finding out the truth about all the mishaps of travellers in the world, it would be discovered that a great many more disasters have happened on smooth and safe roads than on rough and dangerous ones. Some of you who have been in Switzerland, will remember a spot along the border of the Mer de Glace, known as the "bad path"—a narrow ledge, with only room for one person to walk at a time, with a steeply shelving bank below, and an equally steep one above. If you watch a party of tourists threading that path, you see that each one keeps his eye fastened on the ground, sets down his foot each time with the utmost care, and often clings to the hand or staff of the guide in front. And you do not often hear of accidents there, dangerous as the place is. But when a man starts off on a fine, smooth road, he is very apt to think that his feet will take care of themselves, and that his eyes

may be employed as he pleases ; and so, while he is striding along, looking up at the clouds or hill tops, or off to the landscape, his feet are sure to find a stray stone, and down he goes. It is no otherwise in moral experience. Confidence ruins more men than fear. Safety corrupts more men than danger. He who knew human nature as no other knows it, urged on his own disciples no duty more strenuously than that of watching ; and right on from Adam downward there has been a series of sad histories, histories of falls of the men who seemed to be most securely guarded against falling.

Observation seems to show that a power of delusion lurks in the very circumstances which appear to favor firm standing. If you study the remarkable succession of moral shipwrecks which has astonished and shocked society in the last few months, you notice that they are mostly those of men who, to all appearance, had every reason and every help for firm standing ; so that the prevailing tone of comment is that of surprise : “ To think that *he* should fall ! So honored, so trusted, so much to live for ! Such splendid opportunities ! ” And that is not mere surface talk either. When you get inside the circle of these men’s lives, you find the safeguards even stronger than popular comment had represented them. Let me cite you one case. He was a minister of the gospel. He had passed on to middle life esteemed and trusted. He served his church in great financial interests, where hundreds of thousands passed through his hands. He retired from public life with the respect and confi-

dence of the church, and was journeying quietly on toward life's close with a good name, a modest competence, an affectionate family; and then came the tidings that he had fled, in disgrace, with the stolen funds of a public institution in his pocket. You would have said, that if any man had passed the danger of a moral fall he was the man. You could understand how a young man, in the first flush of passion and ambition, might yield to the temptation to secure for himself a life of ease and pleasure by a single desperate act; but for an old man, with the best of his life gone, with all the hard-earned fruit of respect and confidence safely garnered, to throw it all away, and to pass the short remnant of his days under the stigma of a thief—that, indeed, it is hard to explain. One thing you would most surely find, I think, if you could know all the circumstances; and that is, that he had stood firmly so long, had resisted temptation so successfully, had grown so old in honesty, that he had come to think caution needless—to think that an old man and a Christian minister was past the danger of temptation. He found, to his sorrow, that neither age nor priestly station could supply the place of watching and prayer.

Just here it ought to be said that, when the apostle speaks of falling, he does not merely mean gross violations of honor or of law. His word includes all kinds of lapses from the standard of Christian character.

To go back, then, I repeat that a power of delusion lurks in the very circumstances which seem to favor

firm standing. There are always those who sneer at the suggestion of the human heart's deceitfulness and weakness. Such an one will say, "True *manhood* is safe from the danger of a fall. My sense of manly honor and dignity will be an effectual safeguard against the meanness of such moral lapses. As a *man*, it is impossible that I should descend to such depths." Alas, alas! manhood, with all its dignity and self-reliance, is not to be trusted too far, if Paul speaks the truth. He tells us here that temptation is *human*, peculiar to man's nature (for that is one meaning of the word rendered here "common to man.") Poor human nature, at its best estate, is in its very essence susceptible of temptation, and by its very conditions exposed to temptation. It is manhood that is assailed. It is in manhood that the weakness lies enfolded. Nay, it is in the very self-reliance and assurance of manhood that the danger lies. Humanity, *as such*, is exposed to temptation, and in danger from temptation; and hence the prayer of humanity, the world's model of prayer, closes with the petition, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," as though it would leave the petitioner with the thought that while he is ennobled by being a son of God, with the dear privilege of saying, "Our Father," he is not to forget that he is a weak and fallible man in a sinful world.

This power of delusion lies in the most familiar things.

There, for instance, is worship. A man naturally thinks that if there is any place in the world where he is safe from temptation, it is in church, under

the sound of sacred anthems and holy truths, and in the atmosphere of prayer. And yet it is over the church door that God thinks it needful to write a pointed caution, telling church-goers that it is quite possible for them, even amid all the holy associations of a spiritual sacrifice, to offer the sacrifice of a fool. The song which is meant to kindle devotion may exert only a sensuous charm, and the mind of the worshipper be absorbed by its art, to the neglect of its worship. He may be thinking of the beautiful periods of the form of prayer, instead of on his needs and follies and infirmities which the prayer is bearing up to the throne of grace. He may make of his admiration for the sermon, a buckler which shall turn the arrow shot at his conscience. He may be lulled into self-deception and into self-complacency by the ready response of his nature to the sentiment of worship. I have often been impressed with the suggestion of this danger which appears in that sublime Christian chant, the "Te Deum." Closely following that magnificent outburst of praise, "Day by day we magnify Thee ; and we worship Thy name ever, world without end"—comes the prayer : "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin." It seems like a sudden letting down from the very atmosphere of heaven to the dark, dangerous region of earthly sin. And yet, in this very thing, it is true to the spirit of the Bible. All through that Book the two go together—man in the image of God, and man fallen ; man capable of adoration and of communion with God, and of the high, rapt emotions of worship, and man sus-



ceptible to temptation, the subject of the concentrated wiles of the kingdom of darkness. And so in the glorious chant, he is stopped in the full current of his praise, and reminded that he is still a sinful man in a sinful world.

There are the holy ties of family affection. Men naturally think they are safe from temptation in the sweet retirement and innocent interchange of the domestic circle. And yet we have all known a father's or a mother's love to degenerate into idolatry; a parent's just caution and wise authority to give way to hurtful indulgence. It has been but too common that a man's honest pride in his family, and his desire that they should appear in all things as well as their neighbors, have led him to wink at extravagance, and sometimes, alas, to compromise his honesty to enable his household to keep up appearances.

There are beauty and taste—good and pure things in themselves. The man who truly loves beauty shares his love with God; and yet, in this very epistle, we may discover how sin made beauty its ally; how, in that lovely city of Corinth, taste and culture made themselves ministers of corruption, and clothed the foulness of Paganism with a charm which overcame the holy eloquence of Paul, Apollos, and Peter.

Again, there is strictness. A man never thinks he is standing more safely than when he plants himself upon severe self-discipline, the inexorable curbing of his natural inclinations, the closest and strictest regulation of all the details of his life. And all this is well, only there were those who did this, in our

Lord's time, who tithed mint and anise and cummin, and yet strangely overlooked some weighty matters of the law, such as judgment, mercy, and faith, and who were called by a hard name by the gentle Christ himself. And Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, while he urges circumspection in the Christian life, and that with great minuteness of detail, says, "See *how* ye walk circumspectly ;" be circumspect in your very circumspection. See to it that you have a rule, but be careful also that you have the best rule.

So we might go on, taking every influence or set of influences under which men would seem to be most safe, and we should find that in them all lurks the danger of a fall ; that men stand on no ground so high, so safe, or so sacred, that they do not need the apostle's caution, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

But when men fall, no excuse is more frequently on their lips than this : "It was unavoidable. I could not help it. The temptation was exceptional and was beyond my strength." This excuse is squarely met by the text with our second truth, namely, that no man need fall ; and that because every temptation is controlled by God, who will not suffer it to go beyond His children's ability to resist it. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man." Let us not be misled by this word "common." It is not used in the sense in which we say a thing is of common occurrence, or in common use. It does not mean that all men are tempted in the



same way, or that one form of temptation is as common as another. The passage is, literally, "there hath no temptation taken you but such as is *human*." And it carries with it two ideas. First, that temptation is peculiar to humanity as such, so that no man differs from his fellow-man in being tempted, and, second, that temptation is adapted by God to man's strength. God will not suffer him to be tempted above that he is able, but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that he may be able to bear it. So that no man is exceptional in the matter of temptation. He is tempted like other men because he is a man, and his peculiar form of temptation does not excuse him for yielding, because it does not come from any higher or different source from other men's temptations, and is no more severe than, with God's help, he can bear. No "supernatural soliciting" selects a man here and there, and sweeps him resistlessly off his feet. There are, indeed, elements wrought into man's very constitution, whose nature it is to take fire at appropriate contact; but then it is that very nature with those inflammable elements in it which Christ is interested to redeem and to save. It is that very nature which is the object of the whole scheme of divine education and discipline. And so Paul can say to the Corinthians and to us, you are not subject to these temptations as to some blind, brute force, operating by its own natural law, like the downward plunge of a Niagara. Temptation works under God's law. Its pressure is accurately gauged by divine wisdom. The whole matter is summed up in the little story of the

lad whose father was laying package after package upon his extended arms, when a playmate, fearing his load was growing too heavy, said, "Don't you think you've got as much as you can bear?" "Never mind," was the reply, "father knows how much I can bear." That is the fact which takes away the common excuse for falling; "the temptation was too heavy." If, indeed, a man takes matters into his own hands, and goes into temptation, instead of waiting for temptation to take him, then I cannot answer for him. In most cases it will be very little that he is able to bear. But that is not the case contemplated in the text. A child of God, clad in God's armor, and wielding God's weapons, who meets an Apollyon bestriding his path towards heaven, knows in advance that he need not go back one step except he choose. He knows that that enemy is one that he can conquer. If it were not so, the enemy would not be there. God could not suffer an invincible foe to assail you without being unfaithful to you; for he called you into His heavenly kingdom; the kingdom of strength and purity and moral victory; and to call you, and then to oppose to you a temptation too heavy for your strength, would be like your inviting a child to your house, and then locking the door in his face. "But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." He is faithful to His own promises such as these: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee." "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be

burned." "I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world." "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations."

He is faithful to the promise of his own past dealings. The Christian who is sorely tempted to-day, may refresh his faith with the stories of Moses and Joseph, of Job and Elijah. As he is linked to them by like passions and common infirmities, so he is drawn with them into the shadow of the same love which sheltered them from the power of temptation. "The almighty power of God," says a quaint old English divine, "is engaged for the saints' defence : God brought Israel out of Egypt with a high hand ; but did he set them down on the other side of the Red Sea to find and force their way to Canaan by their own policy or power ? When He had opened the iron gate of their house of bondage, and brought them into the open fields, did he vanish as the angel from Peter when out of prison ? No. As a man carries his son, so the Lord bare them in all the way they went. This doth lively set forth the saints' march to heaven. God brings a soul out of spiritual Egypt by His converting grace. Now when the saint is upon his march, all the country riseth upon him. How shall this poor creature pass the pikes and get safely by all his enemies' borders ? God Himself enfolds him in the arm of His everlasting strength. The power of God is that shoulder on which Christ carries his sheep home, rejoicing all the way he goes. These everlasting arms of His strength are those

eagles' wings upon which the saints are both tenderly and securely conveyed to glory." <sup>1</sup>

Thus, then, we find ourselves in the region of the third truth of the text, namely :

There is everything in the divine ordering of temptation to prevent our falling and to increase our stability ; God will, with the temptation, make a way for your escape, that ye may be able to bear it. Just here a new aspect of the subject opens. In all the previous part of the text our thought has been occupied with the idea of deliverance, escape from temptation ; but in these closing words, that ye may be able to bear it, we come suddenly upon the suggestion that in God's economy, temptation may not only be something to escape from, but may also serve a positive purpose in the salutary discipline and the strong maturing of God's children. For, if it be merely a thing to be escaped, why not stop with the word "escape" ? But here it appears that by escape God means something else besides getting clear of the temptation. The clear intimation is, that the temptation may stay by us, and that escaping, in God's sense, may consist in bearing it rightly. So that the thought of escape is complex. It does indeed imply victory over the temptation, but it also implies a larger victory through the sustained conflict with the temptation ; a victory which appears in the general toning up and broadening of the whole character. You go down to the Battery some day and hire a

---

<sup>1</sup> Gurnall, "Christian in Complete Armor."

sail-boat to go to Sandy Hook. And as you look for the direction of the wind, you find it blowing straight up the Narrows, and therefore dead against you. Do you turn round and go home, saying I will defer my sail till some other day when the wind shall be blowing the other way? Not if you know anything about boating; for you know that you can trim your sail at such an angle as to make that very adverse wind carry you to Sandy Hook. You can sail into the very eye of the wind; and though your boat lean over under the strain of your close-hauled sheet, and the water come rushing over your gunwale, you will make good headway, and rejoice in a sense of mastery over the elements, such as never comes with going before the wind. Just so God teaches his children to make temptation drive them toward heaven. Paul prays that the thorn in the flesh may depart from him. That is Paul's idea of escape. God's idea is different and larger. The thorn shall not subdue Paul, but it shall not depart from him. Paul shall escape from it by having it with him. He shall gain a grander victory by becoming a grander man through the torment of the thorn. That is a figure of speech, you say. Well, you and I know that there are enough thorns in the flesh that are a good deal besides figures of speech. The experience is common enough where a child of God is exposed to a lifelong trial, a burden of some kind which he cannot escape, but must take it into his life and adjust his life to it as best he can. And the burden brings with it a daily temptation to peevishness, or to faith-

lessness, or to cowardice, a temptation to slip out from under it at any hazard, and to escape from its daily, galling pressure—duty or no duty. And you know how such men and women have found the grace of God all-sufficient to convert that burden into wings on which they have mounted nearer to heaven.

I have seen, down by the bank of a stream, a rock which seemed to have been placed at the very point where it interfered most with the various processes going on round it. Because of that rock, a tree could not strike freely outward and downward with its roots; the grass which grew round it could not climb over it to fringe the bank; the river was compelled to turn out of its channel. But how quietly Nature took the rock into those very processes, and used it to heighten the beauty of the whole scene. The tree wove round and under it a picturesque network of brown roots, and dropped upon it leaves and flickering shadows from above. The mosses and the gray lichens crept up into the hollows and crevices, and lined them with velvety green and silver. The stream used it to break the monotony of its flow with an eddy, and its silence with a ripple. The grass reached up with its blades to meet the mosses, and in that spot, of all along the bank, the idler and the artist loved to linger.

Even so, many an one has been forced to incorporate with his life, and to carry along with him, day by day, some living, active, growing trial of patience; and, not only in spite of it, but *by means* of it, has developed a life at once fruitful and joyful.



Such have quietly accepted the rankling of the thorn, the daily pressure of the load; and patience, and gentleness, and steady persistence and courage have bloomed in their character until their lives are a continual fragrance. They have escaped the temptation by transmuting it into power. Through such an experience as this, and only thus, one learns the meaning of that apparent paradox of the Apostle James: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." James himself states the solution in the next verse, "Knowing this that the trial of your faith worketh patience;" but something more than a statement is necessary to make us understand it. Temptation is a blessing in disguise, and we work through the disguise to the blessing, only by patient endurance. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; after the endurance, concealed for the time by the obstacles which call out endurance, comes the crown. When he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life. The brow which bears the crown is crossed and wrinkled with lines of care and sorrow, but the hand which is stretched out to take it is a man's hand, strong and trained and deft through long and faithful wielding of God's weapon.

Here, then, we have our lesson to-day. I preach to myself no less than to you, when I repeat the Apostle's words, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." I say to you, on the authority of Him who knew what was in man, the higher your position, the more secure your reputation, the more numerous the circumstances which seem to insure



you against moral or spiritual shipwreck, the more need you have to watch and pray ; the more need to look out for the temptations which lurk about your strongest safeguards, and at those very points at which you think the enemy will not think it worth while to shoot his arrows.

Amid such dangers, lurking at your very firesides and around your very altars of worship, you will be safe only as you shall put your life wholly and implicitly into God's hands. You need not fall, great as is the danger of your falling ; but you will stand only as you shall enlist God's faithfulness on your behalf. Oh, never forget this truth, that no temptation is too strong for God's child. It might, it would surely be, if the matter lay simply between him and temptation ; but when God's faithfulness and God's power come into the question, that changes the whole aspect of the case ; and whatever a fallen Christian may be able to say in his own defence, this excuse, at least, that the temptation was too mighty for his strength, is forever taken out of his mouth by the simple answer, "God is faithful, and you might have had *His* strength." And, remember, too, that God's deliverances from temptation come when they are needed, and not before. Many a young Christian gets frightened at the beginning of his journey. He says : "I am afraid I shall deny my Lord, and disgrace my profession ;" and he begins to imagine certain possible emergencies, and to wonder how he shall extricate himself, and, seeing no way, he works himself up into a state of great distress. He may

quiet his heart. God does not promise the way of escape until the temptation shall have come ; but *then*, He says, with the temptation He will make a way. There is a place on the Hudson River where, as you sail, you seem to be entirely hemmed in with hills. The boat drives straight on toward a rocky wall, and it seems as though it must either stop or be dashed to pieces ; but, just as you come within the shadow of the mountain, a little opening suddenly discloses itself, and the boat is headed into it, and passes out into one of the grandest bays in the river. So it is with temptation. You are not to seek it, not to enter into it ; God promises no way out in such a case. But if it meets you on your heavenward journey, you are to go straight on, though you see no way out. The way will reveal itself in due time, if you only keep on ; and remember, that, as in the river, the beautiful bay lies just round the frowning rock, so, often your sweetest and best experience of life lies just behind your most menacing temptation.

Let us not deceive ourselves, brethren, with any fond dream of some coming time when we can relax our vigilance, and walk with tranquil security the rest of the way to heaven. It will not come. The enemy will dog the path to the end. It has seemed to me as if the progress of a human soul through this world was as that of one entrusted with a fragile and costly vase, to carry it to a king in a distant city, over a road full of rocks and pitfalls, and with a succession of enemies starting up here and there and striking at his treasure. It is a wonder if he reach the city with his

vase unbroken. Yes, it is a wonder, but it is a wonder of grace. It is a wonder which reflects no glory on man, but rather upon that infinite faithfulness which keeps its children as the apple of the eye, and bears them as on eagle's wings through the waste, and up to the city of God,—scarred and bruised, indeed, but presented blameless before the presence of the King of kings with exceeding joy.

TASTE AND HOLINESS.

#### PHILIPPIANS IV.

- (8) Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.
- (9) Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do : and the God of peace shall be with you.

## XIII.

### TASTE AND HOLINESS.

AT the close of the third chapter of this epistle, Paul says : " We are citizens of heaven." We live in this world as those who are natives of another country, bearing our national mark and speaking our native tongue, and looking for the coming of the Lord Jesus to restore us to our true home.

The exhortations of the next chapter grow directly out of this. " If you are thus citizens of heaven, stand fast in your loyalty ; be at peace among yourselves ; rejoice ; be forbearing to one another ; be not unduly burdened with the cares of this world ;" and so the apostle works on toward a close which he strikes in the word " finally," and runs into a strain of appeal which, at the same time, sums up his previous exhortations : " finally, whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, whatever there is anywhere that is virtuous or beautiful or praiseworthy, think on those things, and act out your thinking in your life. Thus the God of peace shall be with you."

" Think on these things." That is more than merely to *remember* them, or to *muse* over them. It is

rather to "exercise the faculties upon them," to apply the mind to drawing out their lessons ; so to think of them as to get out of them all that can be turned to use for growth in holiness, and for practical usefulness and happiness in the world.

Think on these lovely, good, pure, true things. It would seem then that we are responsible for our thinking. Paul urges his brethren to do, but he puts the thinking, pondering, meditating, first. And holy men long before Paul had discerned that men are accountable for their thinking ; else Solomon would not have said, "Keep thy heart with all diligence ;" else David would not have prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart ; try me and know my thoughts." Else Solomon, again, would not have written, "The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination unto the Lord." Too many persons assume that they can have no control over their thoughts. They seem to feel that their mind is like a common canal, through which the tide must needs wash whatever is thrown into it. That is not the teaching of God's Word, nor do they admit the principle in their studies, for instance. Their masters in science or history or composition tell them that they must learn to command and concentrate and arrange their thoughts ; and they find that practice and resolution enable them to do so. Why should not the same practice and the same resolution, especially with the aid of the divine Spirit, enable them to regulate what good or evil passes through their minds, and to exclude that which is unholy and impure, and to discipline the mind into



exercising itself habitually upon what is true and just and lovely?

In this exhortation, then, Paul lays down a Christian duty, to have the mind occupied with good and beautiful things. But it is to be observed that these words may easily be wrested from their strictly Christian construction. There are worldly men who do not believe a word of the Bible, who, nevertheless, would indorse every word of this exhortation: "Think on true things, venerable things, just things, pure things, lovely things." Surely this Paul has a glimmer of common-sense and true appreciativeness with all his fanaticism! Think on these things! Why, that is just what I believe, that a man ought to have and to cherish pure and ennobling thoughts. Above all things, that he ought to think on what is true. That is the ground upon which ninety-nine hundredths of the attacks on Christianity are justified. The assailants claim that they are pushing away falsehood, and giving the world truth in its place. As a late writer has said of certain skeptics, "they want the naked soul of truth; they penetrate through form and exterior to pluck it out; they put aside all covering to get at the core, the solid divine particle itself of truth. Dogmas are husks; creeds are distortions; everything is seen through, nothing is final. He rejects the outside; he peels off coating after coating to come to something solid."<sup>1</sup> As to beauty—whatsoever things are lovely—no one will talk more en-

---

<sup>1</sup> Canon Mozley.

thusiastically about it than an atheist. You find the strictest insistence on the laws of taste among some whose contempt for religion is unconcealed ; you hear the loudest talk about honor among duellists who violate the divine command against murder ; you find absolute ferocity of character among those whose ear is jarred by the slightest discord, and their eye offended by a hairbreadth variation from the lines of symmetry ; you find extreme polish of manners often grafted upon heartless brutality. And yet such people would indorse Paul's words, taking them by themselves.

It is quite needless to say that Paul would be far from feeling honored by any such indorsements as these. Such thoughts of beauty and truth as should be compatible with dispositions or deeds like those I have cited, would awaken only his disgust. Like the spirit over which the sons of Sceva pronounced the name of the Lord Jesus, whom Paul preached, he would have asked, "Who are ye?"

It is quite evident, and it must be held in mind as the very basis of our discussion, that Paul is speaking here of true and just and lovely things on their moral and spiritual side, and not on their artistic and tasteful side. Not that he is insensible to the charms of beauty and nobility, however displayed, but that he is thinking and speaking here of things that are pure in the sight of God ; true to God's standard of truth ; beautiful with the beauty of the Lord.

I wish to speak to-day of the practical issue between beauty and taste in themselves considered, and these

same things considered in their moral and spiritual relations. I say "the issue," for there is a very dangerous and a very subtle issue between these two. I have already foreshadowed it in speaking of those who, with intense love and keen perception of beauty, even in some of its moral relations, unite habitual disregard for the law of God. But I am thinking of it not so much in this grosser form, as in the form in which it creeps stealthily into modern Christian society, and leads not a few practically to believe that religion consists in good taste; that beauty is a substitute for holiness, and elegance for character, and propriety for duty, and contemplation of what is noble and majestic for worship, and which resolves the "moral sense" into love of the beautiful. If this be true, it is time that the Spirit of truth should search such hearts as with a lighted candle, and should teach them the true meaning of the words, "if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

This danger comes always with advancing civilization. The moment that the rough, pioneer work is done, and society begins to crystallize, life begins to develop on its æsthetic side; the refinements and amenities of culture make their way into social intercourse, and the appliances of culture, books, pictures, music, and their whole beautiful train, come in to do their ennobling and refining work. And in older communities there grows up a large class who think a great deal on these things; who give a great deal of time to them, and spend a great deal of money

upon them. These are, in many senses, real benefactors to society. They do a good work in elevating its taste, and in establishing true standards of taste. The man who makes a common article of furniture beautiful—a chair, or a lamp—and sends it into the homes of the community; the man who makes accurate copies of the great standard works of art, and puts them within reach of the poorest, is, so far forth, doing God's work. For, let it be always remembered that God's word nowhere says or implies anything tending to depreciate beauty. Those wretched perversions of the Bible and of Christianity which dedicated to God the ugliest and barest structure in the community, and which assumed that the crucifixion of the sense of beauty was one of the most acceptable sacrifices that could be offered at His throne, are things for which men and not God were responsible. I shall be glad if you will find for me a book which shows a keener sense of beauty and majesty and grace and fitness, which introduces one to more grand and beautiful scenes, or which treats its themes with more sublimity and with a finer play of the imagination than the Bible. See, for instance, what a sense of the beauty of nature pervades the Psalms. See how God Himself gave expression to the artistic sense in the tabernacle and in the temple; and in Paul's writings, you will find all sorts of pictures and figures hidden away in single words, which show how sensitive he was to the charm of the same things which gratified the taste and revealed the skill of the beauty-loving Greek—the stately palaces of Athens

or Corinth, or the manly grace and symmetry which appeared in the race-course or in the arena.

All this is true. But everything which develops itself apart from God and from God's moral law, develops a danger corresponding to its departure ; and beauty and fitness and symmetry, in themselves considered, have not so much of the divine in them, that they form an exception to this rule. On the contrary, the very charm of the beautiful, which seems to raise it so far above the evil and sordidness of earth, makes it the most dangerous ally of evil the moment it is divorced from God. Greece is our standing example of this truth. It is a historian who would be accounted very far from orthodox who says, "In no other period of the world's history was the admiration of beauty in all its forms so passionate or so universal. It colored the whole moral teaching of the time, and led the chief moralists to regard virtue simply as the highest kind of supersensual beauty."<sup>1</sup> And this same historian tells us that Greek public opinion acquiesced without scandal in an almost boundless indulgence of sinful pleasures ; that nameless vices prevailed among the most illustrious men, and that licentiousness was a recognized minister of worship.

Now, when we go back to the Bible, we find beauty everywhere the handmaid of holiness. It is never contemplated as an end unto itself. The Bible refuses to divorce beauty from rectitude. Even, as in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Lecky, "History of European Morals,"

old tabernacle, the most costly and beautiful work was reserved for the holiest place of all, the place where God specially manifested Himself, for the ark of the covenant, the symbol which most vividly figured the divine presence—even so, the higher the development of beauty or sublimity in the Bible, the nearer it brings us to God. Take, for example, the weird, mysterious grandeur of Ezekiel's vision ; it is a vision of the Eternal Himself. Take what is perhaps the most wonderful poetic flight in all literature—the prayer of the prophet Habakkuk—again it is a vision of the Almighty. Hear the Psalmist discoursing of the glory of the starry heavens. How exquisite his imagery : the whole heaven as a chorus of voices proclaiming the glory of God, the days and the nights telling each other of His power and majesty in a wondrous speech of their own unheard by mortal ears ; their line going out to all the earth, the heavens everywhere spanning it and everywhere preaching the same divine sermon ; the sun coming forth from the pavilions of the east as a bridegroom from his chamber ; and yet all this pomp of diction is only to prepare the way for a panegyric upon the law of God ; all the beauty of the starry heavens serves the poet to illustrate the perfection, the surety, the rectitude, the purity, the illuminating power of the statutes of the Lord. Saul had saved fine cattle from Agag's herds to sacrifice to God. It would have been a most princely and impressive sacrifice. None the less does his disobedience cost him his kingdom. Jezebel was beautiful ; her beauty does not palliate



her crimes. Babylon was magnificent, but what cared God for temples or hanging gardens, gigantic walls or stately bridges, when the vessels of His sanctuary were profaned, and the abominations of the people cried to heaven? So the Bible insists throughout on moral beauty as the highest type of beauty, uses every lovely thing in nature and art to emphasize that type, and rejects, with loathing, everything, however attractive otherwise, which refuses that impress.

And, in the highest revelation of Himself which God gave to the world, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, He proclaimed, most unmistakably, the supremacy of moral and spiritual beauty, and its power to assert itself over the most uncongenial and hostile circumstances. We need not enter into speculations (for they can be nothing more) upon the personal appearance of Jesus, whether he was a man of perfect physical beauty as we love to picture him, or one with visage "more marred than any man." Under all such trifling lies the patent fact that the outward life of Jesus was habitually detached from circumstances of beauty or majesty. He drew no helps from that artistic atmosphere which enspheres and glorifies not a few inferior men. He was poor, and poverty is not beautiful. He was the friend and associate of the poor, and much of his life was in contact with squalor and misery. He was a man of sorrows, despised and rejected of men. Take that figure as it bends in Gethsemane in agony such as never man knew; or as it stands in Pilate's hall, crowned with thorns and



with shoulders scarred with the scourge; or as it toils under the weight of the cross, or hangs between two thieves, the very type of physical agony. Put beside this one of the gods of Greece, one of those lovely creations of a beauty-worshipping intellect, a graceful Mercury with winged feet, a sun-crowned Apollo, a robust Hercules, a majestic Jove, and bid the Greek look on this crucified man of sorrows, who has no beauty that he should desire him, and worship him. Do you wonder that the cross was "foolishness" to the Greek? And yet we know that the Greek was mistaken; that there was a deeper beauty which he did not see—the beauty of character, which has been gaining on the world, rising above all circumstances of poverty, suffering, human contempt, and asserting itself to men as the one thing altogether lovely. And the same is true of Christ's ideals as he outlined them to his followers. You find them in the Sermon on the Mount, ideals quite different from the world's. The beautiful, majestic, triumphant men of his kingdom are the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the mourners over moral evil—all of them distinguished by moral beauty, by beauty of character.

So, then, I say that, in all our thought and love and pursuit of what is amiable and beautiful, we must hold by the gospel stand-point, or these fair things will delude us fearfully.

Scores of illustrations of this delusion might easily be cited. For instance, people are not unfrequently deceived into mistaking a certain feeling of admi-

ration toward God as the creator of the beauties of nature, for genuine worship. They go out on some bright morning, and as their eye ranges over a grand scene of mountain and stream and forest, with the pastures covered over with flocks, and the valleys standing thick with corn, they think of the power and goodness of God, and give themselves credit for being quite religious in entertaining such a thought. I stumbled the other day upon the sad story of a morbid man of letters who attained some notoriety in his day, not only for his gifts, but for his violent recoil from the Christian faith, and here is his idea of prayer: "I had opened my window and seated myself in view of the heavens to collect my mind for the daily tribute of adoration to my Maker. The mere act of directing my mind to Him, in the presence of His glorious works, filled me with an inexpressible, though tranquil and rational delight. I said to myself, 'What a glorious gift conscious existence is in itself! Heaven must essentially consist in the absence of whatever disturbs the quiet enjoyment of that consciousness, in the intimate conviction of the presence of God.'" And then he goes on to tell the Deity that He is not to suppose Himself worshipped in the strict sense of the word. "It is long," he says, "since I have renounced the (to me) superstitious practice of falling on my knees and formally addressing unto Thee either praise or petition. I am, however, uninterruptedly in a praying state." Well says the narrator, "The religious feeling that surveys nature simply is weak. The mind expands and has an idea of a

large pervading Being ; but this Being has not a character.”<sup>1</sup>

Men say it is right to indulge their sense of the beautiful ; but too often they become possessed with the idea that beauty in itself has a moral value, and therefore excuse themselves for the neglect of duty or for indulgence in sin, on the plea of gratifying the pure sense of the beautiful. I have known professing Christians to lend the countenance of their presence to spectacles that were morally vile, on the ground that they were so beautiful. Remember that the sense of beauty, which is gratified through sin, is a perverted sense.

Or again, there is danger of resting satisfied with a life which conforms to proprieties merely ; of mistaking an elegant and orderly life for a good life ; of thinking that because the life is passed in the enjoyment of pure tastes, it is for that sole reason a life acceptable to God. Such a life may be as selfish and unchristlike as a miser's.

Or again, there is danger of resting in a superficial view of evil : of forgetting the sinfulness of sin when it ceases to be gross. Some of you will recall that familiar picture in three compartments, representing the history of the prodigal son ; and you may remember that the central picture, which sets forth his life of pleasure in the far country, portrays a scene in which not only eating and drinking, but music and literature and the fine arts bear a part. Remember

---

<sup>1</sup> Canon Mozley, *Essay on Blanco White.*

that sin is no less sin because it is beautifully draped and conventionally recognized. I want to read you one or two passages from a man whom God endowed with a terrible crystalline plainness of speech, and a deep insight into truth. "As the reason is cultivated, the taste formed, the affections and sentiments refined, a general decency and grace will of course spread over the face of society, quite independently of the influence of Revelation. That beauty and delicacy of thought which is so attractive in books, then extends to the conduct of life, to all we have, all we do, all we are. Our manners are courteous; we avoid giving pain or offence; our words become correct; our relative duties are carefully performed. Our sense of propriety shows itself even in our domestic arrangements, in the embellishments of our houses, in our amusements, and so also in our religious profession. Vice now becomes unseemly and hideous to the imagination, or, as it is sometimes familiarly said, out of taste. Thus elegance is gradually made the test and the standard of virtue, which is no longer thought to possess an intrinsic claim on our hearts, or to exist, farther than it leads to the quiet and comfort of others. Conscience is no longer recognized as an independent arbiter of actions, its authority is explained away; partly it is superseded in the minds of men by the so-called moral sense, which is regarded merely as the love of the beautiful, partly by the rule of expediency which is forthwith substituted for it in the details of conduct. . . . Here is a teaching only partially evangelical, built upon worldly principle, yet

pretending to be the gospel—dropping one whole side of the gospel, its austere character, and considering it enough to be benevolent, courteous, candid, correct in conduct, delicate—though it includes no true fear of God, no fervent zeal for His honor, no deep hatred of sin, . . . no sense of the authority of religion as external to the mind, in a word, no seriousness.”<sup>1</sup> It may be well to remember that that is the condition ascribed to the Laodicean church by the Spirit—lukewarm, neither cold nor hot—and that God says to such a character, “I will spue thee out of My mouth.”

But we must not only keep our sense of the beautiful from interfering with duty; there is a step farther, namely, a conscious and habitual consecration of all the beautiful and tasteful elements of our life to God and to Christian service. If you have a beautiful thing, make it teach you heavenly lessons, and turn it to heavenly uses. If you cannot do this, the thing itself is ugly. If you can, you will get from it in this way the very best and richest that it has for you. That flower mission was a Christian thought in its very essence and spirit, a consecration of beauty to Christlike ministry. I knew a man in this city, years ago, who taught a large Bible class of poor people. At regular intervals he would meet his class at his house, where thousands of dollars' worth of paintings covered the walls, and where the shelves were loaded with books and engravings and articles

---

<sup>1</sup> John Henry Newman, Sermon on “The Religion of the Day.”

of beauty. And he would give up his evening to showing and explaining to these people his treasures. They came and received a glimpse into a new world;—hints of a beauty and grace and loveliness, very little of which ever found its way to their poor homes. "They did not appreciate it all," some one will say. No, probably not, but that deed, that consecrated use of beauty, was more beautiful than all the pictures on their benefactor's walls.

And so I close by saying that you will know what beauty, grace, majesty, loveliness, truly are, only when you shall have consecrated all artistic susceptibilities, all beautiful things about you to Christ and to his service. As I have said already, God loves beauty. He loves to have you love what is beautiful. He bids you think on these things. But He wants your sense of the beautiful rooted in holy character, and all the beauty of your life and thought to resolve itself finally into the beauty of holiness. You know what a geode is—a pebble, which on being broken, is found to be full of crystals. Some years ago a very large one was found, which, on being opened, displayed a cluster of brilliant crystals arranged in the form of a cross. And so, when the hard shell of selfishness shall have been broken, and all these beautiful tastes and affinities shall group themselves about the cross, and fall into the lines of Christian ministry and assimilate with that spirit of holy love which is the essence of the gospel and the essence of divine beauty, then shall men know with what good reason the apostle said, "Think on these things."







BALAAM.

2 PETER II.

- (15) Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness ;
- (16) But was rebuked for his iniquity, the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbad the madness of the prophet.

## XIV.

### BALAAM.

BALAAM is mentioned three times in the New Testament, and each time with reproach. It is a sad thing to have a great man's name come down to us only as a warning; saddest of all when we recognize in him a prophet of God, and the vehicle of words which even now thrill our hearts by their beauty and the richness of their divine promise. The contrast is sharp and painful between the sublime prophecy in the twenty-fourth chapter of Numbers, and the words of our text.

But no man traverses the distance between these two extremes in the twinkling of an eye. We never cease wondering at the sudden falls of men from high religious positions to infamy, forgetting that the suddenness is only seeming, and that much of the apparent goodness which preceded the fall was hollow, fallacious, and covering the slope to the final ruin. The special value of the story of Balaam is in uncovering some of these fallacies. As he comes before us in the Old Testament narrative, we may justly say that goodness and greatness appear to blend in him. Not a perfect man, according to the New Testament standard, we yet are impressed with the appearance

of a well-developed sense of duty, a sturdy conscientiousness, a goodly share of moral courage, and a highly-wrought moral enthusiasm.

With this, we find that he is no obscure man. He is known throughout the region as one whose blessing or curse carries power with it. He is one whom kings approach with respectful urgency, and with magnificent offers.

The tribes, in their journey to Canaan, had now reached their last encampment on the east of the Jordan, in the land of Moab. Their camp was pitched on the highest of the three terraces which rose from the bed of the Jordan; and from this height they could look across to the land of promise, and could see the green meadows and balsams of Jericho which was soon to fall beneath their power.

Frightened by the recent success of Israel against the Amorites, Balak, the Moabite king, formed an alliance with the forces of Midian; and the united host encamped on the heights of Abarim, behind the Israelites. But Balak was not disposed to trust entirely to this alliance. He desired supernatural aid; and, for this purpose, sent messengers to Balaam, who lived somewhere among the Mesopotamian hills; a worshipper and prophet of the true God, but so well known and so highly respected that the Moabite king said in this message, "I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed." Evidently the gods of the Moabites were not jealous gods, and did not insist on having a monopoly of devotion. At any rate, their royal worshipper

was not so jealous for their honor, that he was not quite willing to have it shared with another and a strange deity, provided he could secure thereby some stronger spell for the destruction of his enemies. Such is the inherent weakness and inconsistency of pagan faiths. This was why so much emphasis was laid on the truth that the Lord God is a jealous God. He will not give His glory to another; and His true worshippers must trust Him wholly, or not at all.

The envoys from Balak, having presented to Balaam their master's request that he would come and curse Israel, were detained by him until he should have asked counsel of God; and that counsel was promptly given, and in no doubtful terms: "Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed."

Balaam did not argue nor temporize. He acted as a true prophet of God might be expected to act. He took God's literal answer back to the deputies: "The Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you." Would that, for Balaam's sake, the story might have stopped just here. Thus far all is honorable to him; his appeal to divine wisdom, his unquestioning acquiescence in the answer, his point-blank refusal of the ambassadors.

But character is not to be estimated by one such act, however bold and manly. The engineer who knows that fortress wall, knows that there is a certain spot where the first ball will not tell, nor the second; but he trembles when he thinks of the third. In his illustration of the houses on the sand

and on the rock, you remember that our Lord represented them as exposed to a succession of shocks—the floods, the wind, the rain—and the same idea is brought out by Paul in the Epistle to the Ephesians, where the victor, in the spiritual fight, is declared to be the one who stands after having done *all*. Men often exhibit enough moral strength to carry them through one or two ordeals; but the long succession of assaults which waits on all moral warfare will certainly disclose the latent moral weakness at last.

I do not know whether Balak knew his man. At all events this direct refusal did not discourage him. Back came the envoys again, and this time with large promises. “I will promote thee unto very great honor, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me.”

At first sight it appears as though Balaam were going to stand this second ordeal equally well. His words have a good honest ring: “If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more.” Why did he not stop right there? Why did he not tell the envoys to go back to their master at once, saying “God has refused to let me go. Your offers of honor and wealth can make no difference?” But no, we begin to detect Balaam’s weakness in his next words. “Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more.” More, forsooth! What more could he expect? Could any declaration have been more decisive or more comprehensive than the one he had

already received : "Thou shalt not go with them ; thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed ?" Did Balaam know so little of God as to think that the circumstance of Balak's sending a second time, and offering him a bribe, would influence the Almighty to change His positive decree ? Did he think God was a man that He should repent ? Balaam's secret heart is disclosed in that invitation to tarry, and in that second consultation of God. He wanted to go. He was not satisfied with God's answer. He wanted to talk it over again. He did not mean to disobey God, but he thought God might be prevailed on to let him go ; and he meant to prevail on him, if he could. Yet Balaam only illustrates a common tendency of the human heart in all ages. Strange if we have not found traces of it in ourselves. It is not natural for us to accept one utterance of God as decisive, when it clashes with our own purpose. And a wrong desire has not only a power of resistance, but a power of delusion. In ordinary life, you will often notice how completely a man is blinded when he wants a certain thing very much—a house, or a picture, or a marriage alliance. His eyes will be completely shut to the state of his own purse, to the rightfulness of other claims, to defects of character in another ; and he will plunge into a folly or extravagance which, perhaps, cripples him for the rest of his life. And this same power of delusion often gives a man a false and debased view of God Himself. When he wants to gain some end, or to pursue some course which is wrong or imprudent, while he is neverthe-



less afraid to violate God's command, he often tries to bring God into complicity with his purpose. He refuses to accept the clear indication of God's word or Spirit, that he had best drop the thing entirely, and turn his back on it. It comes back to him with new allurements, and instead of saying: "The word is spoken, God's will is declared, and there is an end of the matter," he says, like Balaam, "Do not go yet. Let me talk it over once more with God. Let me see if I cannot find a way to gratify myself without positively disobeying Him." The man is so blind to the awful purity and truth of the divine character, as to think that, in this particular case, because the thing is so dear to him, God will relax the stringency of His law, and grant his desire. It was against this delusion that those solemn words were written, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked."

But we find this error of Balaam's character leading into another and more radical one. We get down here to one of his fundamental principles of action, and we find it thoroughly unsound. Bear in mind that Balaam has no intention of disobeying God. He will not go in the face of a direct prohibition, and if he goes, he does not mean to speak anything but what God shall tell him. But at this very point you see that the emphasis in Balaam's mind is upon *not disobeying*. He wanted God to open some way whereby he could accomplish his own pleasure, and yet keep within the limit of obedience. Whereas, the emphasis ought to have been upon carrying out to the letter God's first injunction, "Thou shalt not go

with them ; thou shalt not curse them." So his error may be simply put in the words of a great modern divine :<sup>1</sup> " His endeavor was not to please God, but to please self, without displeasing God."

And here we see the worm at the root of a good deal of service which goes under a higher name than did Balaam's. The Christian ideal of service to God is that of an enthusiasm with love as its mainspring ; a service which is spontaneous, generous in the bestowment of all its powers, unselfish, and not disposed to stand on what it conceives to be its rights. It is illustrated by the woman who broke the alabaster box of ointment on Jesus' head, and poured out the whole without stint. Everywhere, love's service seeketh not her own. Love says : " Only let me know what God's will is, and my delight shall be to do it." This is the plane upon which Christ puts His disciples when He says : " Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends." It is the plane of confidential relationship : the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth, but the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him. This relation involves obedience and service, it is true ; but it is something more than mere obedience or mere service. It is coöperation : God and man working in the harmony of perfect love to carry out God's will.

But a man may be content to live on the lower plane of bare obedience, in which case the great question of his life will be, not, " How can I please

---

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Newman.

God? What can I do for Him?" but "How much can I do for self within the limits of God's law? How much can I keep for self without defrauding Him?" Such an one abandons the loving, impulsive, generous side of service, and takes up with the cautious, niggardly, self-interested side. He substitutes the obedience of fear for the obedience of love.

And what is our heavenly Father's view of such service from one whom He would fain regard as a son and a friend? You may answer the question from your own parental feeling. Suppose you had bidden your boy not to go within a certain distance of a dangerous stream which ran through your grounds; and suppose that every time you happened to see him at his play, you should find him just as near the line as he could go without actually disobeying you, looking longingly over to the stream; that every time you talked with him about his day's pursuits, you should find that his thought was dwelling on that forbidden pleasure; that he was continually hinting his desire to have you withdraw your command, and seeking for an excuse to evade it. Would you be satisfied with such obedience, even though he should never transgress? Would not his behaviour tell you, unmistakably, that his heart was set, not on doing your will, but his own? And yet how much just such service as this there is, which goes under the name of Christian service, which consists in an absence of actual transgression rather than in the free will offering of the life. An absence of transgression do I say? Let us not be too sure of that. That, perhaps, is the

way men view it. They may think it makes very little difference which way the secret desire tends, so long as the outward life is kept within bounds ; but it is the tendency of that secret desire which makes all the difference to God. It was Balaam's longing to go with the Moabitish envoys which made the great, final difference in the issue of his life. A professing Christian does not go over the boundary, perhaps, but does it not indicate a strange state of things in a Christian heart that it should want to go so near? He does not mean nor want to be identified with God's enemies, but is it not a strange longing in a Christian heart, to want to have so much of their society? He does not want to be a lover of pleasure more than of God, but is there not a singular inconsistency in his zeal to pursue worldly pleasure up to the very limit of Christian fidelity? He does not want to transgress the bounds of honesty in business, but does it look like hearty sympathy with the high, broad, generous morality of the gospel, when he is willing to stretch the morals of trade to the very verge of fairness? It is this spirit which we have to fear in the church at large. This spirit, which keeps men down on the low plane of fearful obedience, instead of the spirit which leads them up to the higher level of loving consecration ; this spirit which wants just as much of the world as it can possibly smuggle in on the road to Heaven ; this spirit which is afraid openly to disobey God, but which, nevertheless, longs for that which He forbids. This is not the spirit of Christ's friends ; not the spirit which will make men cham-

pions of truth and holiness ; not the spirit which will make the Church a terror to evil-doers, or a bright and shining light in an evil and compromising world. The only spirit which will work such results is that which found voice in the words of Him whom Balaam saw in the vision of prophecy, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work."

The result of Balaam's second consultation with God is very startling, and, at first sight, puzzling. We have been prepared to expect that the first refusal would be repeated and sternly emphasized with a rebuke of the prophet's persistence. Instead of this, God seems to give way. He comes to him by night and says : "If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them ; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do." That was exactly as Balaam wanted it. He did not want nor mean to curse Israel. He did not want to go with Balak's messengers, and God gave him the permission he desired, and laid the prohibition just where he would have laid it himself.

So he was off betimes the next morning. How prompt men are to move when they are carrying out their own wishes. But now we are told that, after allowing him to go, God's anger was kindled because he went, and the angel, with drawn sword and menacing look, met him with God's message of wrath. Does not this look like caprice ?

On the contrary, it opens to us one of the most awful features of God's dealing with men. There is no



inconsistency nor caprice here. God's will was expressed in the first refusal : "Thou shalt not go with them ; thou shalt not curse them." That will had not changed. God's intent was no different when He permitted Balaam to go than when he refused him ; but Balaam's perverseness of heart had complicated the matter, and had introduced a new element into it ; and it was this new element which was contemplated by God's permission. It not unfrequently happens that permissions are God's most fearful punishments ; that the worst judgment God can send upon a man is to give him his own way. We are often perplexed and troubled at the prosperity of wicked men, wondering why God permits them to have their own way and does not judge them, and we forget that, possibly, the judgment is already begun ; that in giving them their own way, God is letting them work out their own judgment. That terrible passage in the first chapter of Proverbs shows that the wise man had recognized this truth : "For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord : they would none of my counsel ; they despised all my reproof : therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them."

There was one encampment of Israel which bore an awful name, Kibroth-hattaavah, "the graves of greediness." They left a multitude of their kinsmen in those graves. God had provided for them the food best suited to their condition, His own spe-

cial gift, the manna falling fresh from heaven every morning. But they were discontented. There is something almost ludicrous in the spectacle of that host of people weeping at the remembrance of the flesh-pots of Egypt, and crying: "Who will give us flesh to eat?" The answer came from an unexpected quarter. The God who had all along refused them flesh, suddenly said: "*I will give you flesh to eat.*" It came on the wings of the wind. The blast which blew from the Arabian Sea, bore into the camp the hosts of the migrating quails, and for a day's journey on either side the camp, they lay piled two cubits high on the face of the earth. The people might revel in flesh. Let the seventy-eighth Psalm, Asaph's Psalm of instruction, finish the story: "They tempted God in their heart, by asking meat for their lust. Yea, they spake against God. They said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? . . . Therefore the Lord heard this, and was wroth; so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel; because they believed not in God, and trusted not in His salvation; though He had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, and had rained down manna upon them to eat. . . . He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea. . . . So they did eat, and were well filled: for He gave them their own desire; they were not estranged from their lust; but while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel."



So God often punishes men by answering the prayer of their estranged hearts. They have either the positive prohibitions of His word, or other equally clear indications of His will, pointing them away from certain courses which they wish to pursue, or indicating God's denial of certain things which they want. Yet they will not accept God's decision in the matter as final. They want to talk it over and argue it with Him, or they reject His decision with contempt, and press on after the coveted boon; and, finally, God withdraws His restraint. He says, "Have your own way. You are determined to be rich; see! here are silver and gold to your heart's content. You are determined to form such a connection; well, have your desire. You are determined to thrust yourself into public life, and to have your ears tickled with the popular breath; you were better fitted for a more quiet sphere, and I would gladly have kept you there, for your own sake; but go out into the wider, more tumultuous life." I know not how many of us to-day may be reaping the fruit of our own heart's lust in something or other which God has conceded to our desire, only to be our pain and our daily trial. You know how often the coveted riches have buried manhood under their accumulations; how often the coveted alliance has proved a snare and a life-long pest; how often the coveted fame has brought bitterness and slander, and disappointment in its track. Now and then my attention is called to people who have taken the direction of their life into their own hands; who have deliberately set themselves to carry

out their own godless and selfish principles. They think the Bible an antiquated book, and they want none of it in fashioning their own lives or their children's. They have set out "to have a good time," as they say, and they mean to have it, and in their own way. They form not the associations which are best, but the associations which please them. They mean to have their cultured, elegant leisure, no matter what duty stands in the way. They will gratify pride and selfishness, no matter who goes under. And in God's tolerance, and it would almost seem furtherance, of these lives along their chosen line, I see their retribution working itself out. I hear God saying, "Have your own way. I have warned you. I have called and you have refused. I give you your heart's desire. You shall be filled with your own devices. The calamities which begin to fall in along the line as it is farther and farther drawn out, may all be traced to the original, perverted desire and determination to please self, and not God. Balaam received a terrible hint of his mistake long before he reached his destination. The angelic messenger bestriding the path, who made the dumb beast start back and tremble, and finally speak with human accents, laid open Balaam's delusion, and showed him that, whereas he had congratulated himself on having secured God's permission, he was riding toward God's wrath, along the very line of his permission. That in his very permission, God was withstanding his perverse way. Balaam would have gone back then, but it was too late. The angel said, "No ; you must go the way you have chosen."

But men are usually blind to this fearful truth. They rejoice in God's permission to have their own way, and when the appropriate retribution comes, they lay it to circumstances. Balaam, not seeing the angel of the Lord in the path, grew angry at his beast which started, and shrank, and crushed his foot against the wall, and began to belabor the poor dumb creature. And so men, overlooking the great, eternal truth that all the evil in life grows out of being in wrong relations to God, put it to themselves that their evil grows out of being in wrong relations to circumstances, and curse circumstances as the cause of their disaster. They forget that a man is never in right relation to circumstances until he is in right relation to God. They think that the evil circumstances have come to them upon their road, whereas they have come to the evil circumstances by taking the wrong road. Many of the disasters which seem to them the product of the day, are linked by invisible lines with that point, far back in their history, perhaps forgotten, where the ways parted, and where they left God's way and followed their own.

One thing more is to be briefly noted. Balaam was not ruined when he took the road to Moab. The fact that God opened his eyes to his mistake showed that there was still a chance of retrieval. If he had accepted the warning which laid bare his radical mistake, he might, though with pain, have retrieved himself in the very position in which his error had placed him. He did not accept it. He went on his way. He was God's mouthpiece for one of the

grandest prophecies of the Old Testament. God used him even while He punished him. He blessed Israel even while the curse fell on his own head. But the old perverseness, the old, worldly, self-seeking spirit, was too much for him in the end. Not his going with Balak, but the godless desire which prompted him to go, and which he did not overcome, brought his ruin at last; made him the tempter of God's people, and brought down on him the swift and summary judgment of an outraged God. So, while these judgments which men work out for themselves are their punishment, they are also their warning; and though they set men walking in roads from which God would gladly have kept their feet, yet, if men will accept the warning, they may, even by the hard road in which their own transgression has placed them, in the brave fight with the calamities which their own folly has brought upon them, work out retrieval, and fight their way back to God at last. But it is a dangerous experiment, and Balaam's story proclaims its most common result.

Thus, then, amid numerous lessons which this history furnishes, we carry away with us two. The one is a warning against occupying that low plane of service to God, which is merely the obedience of fear without the impulse of love, and the aim of which is not how we may please God in all things, but how much we may please self without actually disobeying God.

The other is the danger of being left to our own way. The temptation to want our own way does not

cease with experience ; but I think that apart from the warnings of God's word, most of us have pages in our record to which we now and then turn back with shame, and with thankful tears bless God that He refused to give us our heart's desire. And the result of such reminiscences should be, at every movement of our perverse wills away from God, to make us cry out : " O God, quench the first spark of this desire, and, above all things, save me from myself."



CHRISTIAN SELF-SUFFI-  
CIENCY.



#### PHILIPPIANS IV.

- (11) I speak in respect of want : for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.
- (12) I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound : everywhere, and in all things, I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.
- (13) I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

## XV.

### CHRISTIAN SELF-SUFFICIENCY.

THE apostle has been speaking of the liberality of the Philippian church toward himself. On several occasions they had sent him pecuniary aid ; and as soon as they heard of his imprisonment at Rome, they dispatched Epaphroditus with a fresh supply. It is after receiving this last contribution that he writes, in terms of warm thankfulness for the gift, and of high praise for the givers.

At the same time, he does not wish the Macedonian brethren to think that he is dependent upon human aid. Hence the first words of our text, "Not that I speak in respect of want," that is, as one who is in want, "I am deeply grateful to you for your affectionate interest in me. I have given you a high proof of my love for you by accepting gifts from you ; but I am not dependent on your gifts for the support of my life or for the prosecution of my work. I have learned, in whatever position I am, therewith to be *self-sufficient*."

That has a very conceited and arrogant sound to us, who have come to use self-sufficiency almost wholly in a bad sense. We are tempted to say: "Is this the courteous Paul meeting the gift which

his friends have sent him out of their deep poverty, with the assertion that he is quite able to take care of himself? Is this the humble Paul, talking like a hard, proud Stoic about his own self-sufficiency?"

We may be quite sure that the word, in Paul's mind, had a meaning quite different from this evil one; and that meaning it shall be our object to develop, and to show how the apostle is our example in the virtue of Christian self-sufficiency.

I have spoken of a Stoic; and it is not a little remarkable that this word "self-sufficiency" was a favorite word with that very important sect of philosophers. A Stoic would have used Paul's very expression: "I have learned to be self-sufficient in every position in life." And here some modern thinkers may step in, and say: "There, you see that Paul, after all, is no improvement on the heathen teachers of his time." Unfortunately for these thinkers it appears that Paul is very far from meaning the same thing by the same word. The philosopher, when he said, "I am self-sufficient," meant that he had in his own character, without any aid from any quarter, the power which made him independent of circumstances. He had won that power himself, by study and culture and self-discipline; and when trouble or adversity came, he fell proudly back on his own will, on his own power of resistance, on his own dignity as a man, and bade defiance to trouble.

But Paul, you observe, even while he is talking of self-sufficiency, throws self into the background. He can do all things, but not by his own discipline, nor

by his own strength of will, but through Christ who strengtheneth him. And in various places in his writings you find the same sense of dependence on some one else mingling with the strongest assertions of his independence of circumstances. Surely he is a rich man—what we call an independent man—to whom one can say, “All things are yours.” So says Paul to the Corinthians, but he adds: “Ye are Christ’s.” You and all that belongs to you, belong to Christ. Again he writes: “That ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:” that is independence indeed; “all sufficiency in all things,” but wait a moment. What is that little sentence at the beginning of the passage? “God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that ye, having all sufficiency may abound.” So the sufficiency is God’s gift after all. And once more, look at the third chapter of the second Epistle to the Corinthians. If we should take it up without knowing anything about the writer, and begin to read, our first impression would perhaps be: “Well, there is a good deal of self-sufficiency here. This writer takes very high ground toward his correspondents.” Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Do we need any commendatory letters? See what we have done among you. See what we have made you. You are our letters. But a line or two further on, we read: “You are the letter of Christ, ministered by us. We were only his ministers or servants. The spirit of the living God wrote his record upon your hearts.” Just hear this self-sufficient Paul: “And such trust have

we through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything, as of ourselves ; but our sufficiency is of God. He hath made us able ministers of the New Testament."

I think, by this time, we must see that Paul and the philosopher mean quite different things by self-sufficiency. The Stoic is proud and self-centred ; Paul is humble, and centred in Christ. The Stoic withdraws within himself. Paul betakes himself to Christ. The one says : "I have everything in myself to enable me to defy circumstances." The other, "My God shall supply all your need." Both are self-sufficient ; but the philosopher's self-sufficiency lies in his own natural self, while the apostle's self-sufficiency is in the *new self*, created in him by Christ. It resides in that life which he describes thus : "Not I live, but Christ liveth in me. For me to live is Christ."

Here, then, we have the characteristics of Paul's self-sufficiency. He is independent through dependence on Christ. He is self-sufficient through sinking self in Christ. Paul, therefore, is our illustration of this great and vital truth : THAT A MAN'S TRUE RELATION TO CIRCUMSTANCES IS DETERMINED BY HIS RELATION TO CHRIST.

Now, there are a great many people who, doubtless, think themselves independent and self-sufficient, and who are so perhaps, in a certain sense, but not by any means in the highest Christian sense.

What is the popular idea of being independent of circumstances? It comes out very oddly sometimes in the talk of people whose worldly condition has

changed. They say, Oh, yes, they are coming down in their style of living ; they are going to give up a great many things, they are going into a smaller house ; but they shall nevertheless be very happy. But you find that, after all, they are not independent of circumstances. They have a small reserve of circumstance to fall back on. They are not going to forfeit all the elegance and comfort of life. They say, "We have a great many worldly blessings and comforts left yet." This is not wrong, understand. I am not condemning it. I only use it as an illustration of the fact, that while, perhaps, they religiously think that they are showing themselves independent of circumstances in being cheerful and brave, they are yet leaning a good deal on circumstances. Suppose something cuts away the little reserve of elegance and comfort, and every other mitigating circumstance. What then ? Here is a man who says : "I can defy the world ; I am not rich. I have to wear coarse clothes and eat coarse food, but I am well and strong, and I have a good name among men ; and though I have a good many cares, yet I can keep a contented heart, and be independent of circumstances." It may be all true, and yet the statement amounts just to this, that he is independent of all circumstances save good health, a good name, and enough to eat and wear, however coarse. Suppose all those bottom circumstances change. Suppose God takes away health, and lets slander blast his name, and cuts off even the poor supply of bread and clothing. I do not say that the man will not be



independent of circumstances even then ; but independence and self-sufficiency will mean a good deal more than they do now.

There was Job. The oxen and asses were taken away, but the sheep and the camels and the servants and the children were left yet. Then came a thunder-storm and destroyed the sheep. Well, there were the camels, at any rate ; but, in comes a messenger with the news that the camels and their keepers have fallen into the hands of the Chaldeans. Yet he can comfort himself with his family ; and, lo ! the great wind arises, and Job is childless in a breath. Still his person is untouched ; but soon comes the foul disease which transforms him into a mass of loathsome flesh ; and his wife does not prove an efficient comforter, and his friends, good men enough, but displaying as little tact as good men often show when they try to deal with a nobler and finer nature than their own, only succeed in adding the last drop of bitterness to his cup. Such cases are not confined to poetry or to allegory. We ourselves have a proverb that "troubles never come singly," and you must have noticed how often, when God begins to smite, He smites along the whole line. He takes a dear child from its mother's arms. By and by another babe is sent, and the mother dries her tears, and even while she thanks God for the consolation He has sent her, lo ! the cradle is empty again. A rich man loses money, and even while he thinks of reserved funds on which he will draw, tidings come that his reserves are dissipated, and that everything is gone.



The question of Christian self-sufficiency is never fully answered, until this question is answered: How is it going to be with you when everything is gone, when you and God stand alone together, and you have absolutely nothing? Can you live then? Can you be self-sufficient then? Is God alone enough to you to make you absolutely independent of circumstances?

And the question gains force as you note that Paul's idea of self-sufficiency is not that a man *merely exists* when circumstances are all against him; not that he is to be like a bare rock lying passive to the sweep of successive breakers. It is rather that he is to make head against circumstances, and develop some positive good out of his life, and grow in godly character if he does nothing else, in whatever state he is. Paul showed that he was not dependent on outside aid to prosecute the work of an apostle. When supplies failed, he could work with his own hands, and make tents, and preach too. When he could not do that, when he was a prisoner at Rome, and before the supply from Macedonia reached him, he was making use of his opportunities to preach Christ to his guards and to strengthen the hands of timid Christians that visited him; and the tone of this epistle, written from his prison, is not that of a man who is enduring under protest. On the contrary, it is full of joy and cheer and stirring thought from beginning to end.

Let us see how the apostle himself expands this thought; and, remember, he speaks from personal ex-

perience. It will not answer for a man who wants to drive home such a truth as this, merely to philosophize and to dispense high-sounding words about the superiority of mind to matter, and the power of will over circumstances. He must be able to say as Paul does here, "I know."

See, then, how the apostle puts this Christian independence into relation with low estate, and that, too, a low estate which implies a coming down from something higher: "I know how to be abased." Did he not? Look at the young man at whose feet the murderers of Stephen laid down their clothes; the pupil of Gamaliel, the pride of the Jewish schools, the commissioned agent for the extinction of heresy. What position might he not have held? I fancy I can hear some old Jew who had known him and had been proud of him in those days, coming into his Roman prison, and saying, "Truly, Paul, this is a great letting-down for you." For such a man, with such recognized powers, to be stoned and publicly lashed and imprisoned, was surely to be abased. And this is a very hard experience to anybody. Paul was human, and he felt it. It is hard to take the third or fourth place, or no place, after one has been first. Hard to lose the consideration which even wealth gives; hard to exchange cultured associations for vulgar ones. Yet men and women are daily called on to do just such things, and when they are, the question is answered for them: how much does their life depend on these things? If these are all their resources, then there is nothing when these are gone.

These are all external to them ; it remains to be seen if there is anything *in* them which the removal of these things cannot affect. It remains to be seen whether the man's self-respect depends on his being number one, or upon his own consciousness of manhood and of honor, and above all of being a son and an heir of God through Jesus Christ. It remains to be seen whether the man's refinement and delicacy depend on cultured associations, or whether they are part of himself, so that new and coarser associations, instead of deteriorating his fineness, merely glide over and round him as foul water on pure and polished marble ; nay, more : whether this same refinement of nature may not disclose power to shame and lift and purify its tainted environment, and to create in it affinities for purity.

But if coming down is a test of a true self-sufficiency, going up is often a severer one. Paul said he knew how to abound as well as how to be abased. Many a man who keeps tolerably well poised while he is going down, loses his head when he begins to ascend. I think if you could get the honest testimony of the majority of those who have experienced both adversity and prosperity, you would find it to the effect that abounding required more grace than being abased. The question is, whether there is that in a man's own self which will keep the flavor and quality of his manhood unimpaired in spite of the temptations of prosperity. Whether the man himself is so much and so true that men look through his circumstances to him, and feel that he is better and greater

in himself than anything which circumstances may make him. Whether he will stand the stripping off of all that factitious dignity with which prosperity clothes one, and appear to all true souls the nobler in his naked self. How many men and women can stand that test? You know the facts as well as I. You know what infinitesimal selves sudden prosperity often brings to light. How easy it is to see, when a man or woman becomes suddenly rich, what their real ideal of manhood or of womanhood is. How often you find that it consists in what they have and not in what they are. You see how often they will fly in the face of the best social sentiment, and of true charity, and of natural obligation—yea, often of common honesty, under the impression that money will compensate for all defects, and will carry them through anything. Many a man who has been esteemed a kind and neighborly man, as men go, so long as he was a commonplace man with no more resources than his neighbors, has developed into a veritable tyrant the moment he obtained a little power. You see the thing in the surly insolence of scores of ignorant and vulgar men who are placed in some position of a "little brief authority."

And then, further, what a subtle power to undermine the spiritual life lies in prosperity. The very essence of a true self-sufficiency, the very basis of a real independence of circumstances, is dependence on God; faith; living as seeing the invisible; but when one has so many visible supports, how easy it is for him to lose the sense of dependence on the invisible.

When a man has abundant revenues pouring in from farm and stock and factory, when he sees so many strong hands and such a vast array of machinery ministering to his prosperity, how easy it is for him to forget that every good gift and every perfect gift cometh from the Father. And the point to be especially noted is this: that just to the degree in which he loses out of his life the sense of humble dependence on God; just to the degree in which he bases his happiness upon his possessions rather than upon the fact of his relation to God; just to the degree in which he loses sight of the fact that man lives by God, and not by God's gifts; just to that degree his character is impaired and his nobler self degenerates. Just so far he falls short of a true self-sufficiency. Just so far he has lost out of his manhood the element which goes to make it independent of circumstances.

So Paul goes on to say that he knows how to be full and to be hungry. Even under the pressure of a lower class of needs—bodily needs—he has learned to be self-sufficient. A man may be well fed, and yet little better than a beast. He may be hungry, and yet be nobler than any king. What an echo of our Lord's words we hear in the words of this apostle: "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." And yet one does become so painfully impressed with the practical denial of this truth which appears in not a few professed followers of him who uttered it. So many people are restless and troubled because they cannot have this



or that. They want a picture on their walls, or an ornament on their persons, or this or that amusement, or a house of such a size or in such a place ; and they show, by the way they fret and worry over these things, and by the efforts they make to get them, by the foolish shame they manifest at not having them, and by being absorbed in them, if they have them, to the neglect of better and higher things—they show, I say, that they believe that a man's life *does* consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses. They show that they do not believe that the simple fact of living by faith in God, and with the dear sense of being God's child, is enough of itself to make blessedness, and is the one central fact which will put them in right relation to all possible circumstances.

This kind of self-sufficiency does not come by nature. The other kind, the worldly self-sufficiency, is thoroughly natural. It requires no school of philosophy to teach it. You may see it any day in any healthy, manly boy, who laughs at the cautions of his elders, and feels himself sufficient for all possible emergencies. But Christian self-sufficiency is learned only of Christ, and Christ's favorite method of teaching is by experience. Paul's word here is very suggestive: "I am instructed." It was the word used of the long and painful process of initiation into the religious mysteries of Paganism. "I have been initiated, through much tribulation ; through stripes and imprisonments ; through hunger and thirst ; through perils of rivers and perils of robbers ; through stoning

and slander and shipwreck—I have been initiated into this divine mystery of being everywhere, and in all things, self-sufficient, independent of circumstances.”

But however painful the process, the result can be reached. Paul attained in this, nothing which is not possible to you. You can, simply through being a son of God by faith in Jesus Christ—simply by living your life in intimacy with God, and in dependence upon Him, you can have a manhood which shall set you above circumstances; a self which shall make you master of circumstances. God is better than all His gifts. All His gifts are included in Him. And it is possible for you to stand in the universe empty-handed and alone with God, and yet be richer than all the kings of the earth. The hungering Christ, refusing the kingdoms of the world, is greater and richer than he who offered him the world's glory and dominion. I remember one bright day last summer, when I threaded my way up through the mountain glens to where a plain little wooden chapel stood in the midst of a few scattered homes of the poor. And I went on to the humble home of the young minister who had come thither to work, knowing well the poverty of his flock, stipulating for no salary, but simply committing himself to God, and going cheerfully about his work, taking what God sent. I found that God sent a good deal by various channels in the course of the year, and the minister said he never had fared so well in his life as he had since God alone took care of him.



So when sorrow comes, when there has gone out of the life that round which its best, divinest affections had twined, there is such a thing as being master of circumstances even then. I do not mean that there is such a thing as being insensible to sorrow, dead to the cruel sense of loss. A man may brace himself to bear such sorrow, and may bear it in silence, and shed no tears, yet feel the smart just the same. Stoicism could do as much as that. But I mean that a man may have the full sense of sorrow, and the keenness of the pain of loss in his heart, and yet realize that there is a part of him, and that the best part, which the sorrow does not and cannot reach; that there is a life which he lives—the life hid with Christ in God—on a high plane above the mists of earth, where God reveals Himself as the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

And, finally, there is a positive side to this subject. Christian self-sufficiency, as we have already hinted, does not exhaust itself in mere endurance. It is active and aggressive. It makes powers out of men. It not only does not cripple, it enlarges their resources. Paul says, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

On this I have not time to dwell. And now we come to-day to the very place where we can best learn this lesson, to the table of the Lord. We come, I think I am not mistaken, with a painful sense of our own insufficiency. Any one of us can tell a story of how self has tried great things and has failed; how self has plunged into great sorrows and has been

well nigh drowned ; how self has been mortified and humiliated ; how circumstances have gone against us ; how earthly props have broken. Here, then, is the place to turn from all this to something better. Here a voice speaks to us of a sufficiency which will stand the test of every state ; everywhere, in all things. With the infinite possibilities of life before us, that is the very thing we want. Nothing short of this will answer. And here it is offered us in symbol. Christ says to us, "Take me into your life, not to supplement, but to crowd out and supplant the old self. Let your sufficiency be henceforth of me. Read in this broken bread and outpoured wine the story of one who pleased not himself, who lived not by bread but by God, who was a man of sorrows, acquainted with the worst the world could heap on him, yet whose manhood shines with all the purer lustre in this setting of poverty and shame ; who himself was more, and greater, and better, than all his circumstances ; who, in spite of his circumstances, is the captain of our salvation, the theme of our loftiest songs, the object of our adoration. May we be like him. He made at least one man able to say, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be self-sufficient." Has his power exhausted itself with this one ? Or does he not rather say to you and to me to-day, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" ?



CHRISTIAN RELATIONS NOT  
AFTER THE FLESH.

2 CORINTHIANS V.

(16) Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh.

## XVI.

### CHRISTIAN RELATIONS NOT AFTER THE FLESH.

ALL men's lives are traversed at some point by a sharply-marked division-line. Sometimes it is drawn at a change of fortune ; sometimes at a change of character ; sometimes at a change of position. Across it they look back as into another sphere of being, and contemplate their life there as better or worse, happier or more wretched than in the present state.

In a Christian experience this line marks a change in the fundamental law of the life, and is drawn at conversion. Looking back of this point, the Christian says : " Once I was a servant of sin, now I am a servant of Christ. Once I was in bondage, now I am free. Once I lived for self, now not I live but Christ liveth in me."

In this text we strike such a dividing line in Paul's experience, in the word " henceforth." This word points backward to a state of things in sharp contrast with his present and his future life. A broad chasm is between the past and the present, and the particular point of contrast to which he calls attention is the new relation in which the death of Christ and his own conversion place him with reference to his fel-

low men, and the new way in which he regards them. However he may have previously looked at men, by whatever standards he may have been wont to measure them, with whatever purposes he may have dealt with them, *henceforth* he knows no man after the flesh.

Paul's way of looking at men, therefore, will form the subject of our discussion, as suggesting the true point of view from which all Christians ought to regard their fellows.

First, then, what does the apostle mean by knowing men "after the flesh?" The expression "after the flesh" is a common one in Paul's writings, and means, generally, according to the natural way of the world; according to the principles of the worldly, sensual, sinful life. To know a man after the flesh is, therefore, to regard him solely in his worldly relations to ourselves or to society. If I regard a man as happy only because he is rich or renowned, if I am interested in him only as he ministers to my worldly interest, if my kindly feeling toward him exhausts itself in aiding him to fame or fortune, if, in short, I have no thought for him except as he is related to this world, I know him after the flesh.

We find an illustration of Paul's meaning in his own experience. In some of the infant churches, notably in the Corinthian and Galatian churches, he was bitterly opposed and hated as the enemy of Judaism. Judaism had degenerated into a mere form of godliness. It was a system of the flesh, and regarded men solely with reference to the flesh. Was a man



circumcised? Did he eat with Gentiles? Did he keep the law of Moses? Did he observe Sabbaths and new moons? Of what tribe and family was he? In what school was he educated? These were the important questions.

From all this Paul cut himself loose. He refused to look at men in this way. Forms and ordinances, he tells them, are nothing. "Why," he says to the Colossiáns, "as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, after the commandments and doctrines of men, for the satisfying of the flesh? Circumcision profiteth nothing. As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised. Men are not to be estimated according to their nation or their family." Those are true Israelites, he tells the Philippians, who worship God in the spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh; and he goes on to show them how completely he himself had relinquished all advantages growing out of his lineage and standing in the Jewish Church. "The flesh! Would you urge on *me* the claims of the flesh? If the flesh counted for anything, which of you could boast of it more than myself? I was of direct Israelitish descent—no heathen proselyte nor Ishmaelite. I was indeed a Jew, as distinguished from a Gentile, a Hebrew as distinguished from a Greek-speaking-Jew; but more than all I was an Israelite, descended not from Jacob, the supplanter, but from Israel, the prince of God. I was of the honored tribe of Benjamin, the only tribe which stood by Judah in the great separation. I was a Hebrew, never forsaking my na-

tive tongue. I belonged to the strictest sect of legalists. I was a zealous persecutor of Christianity. I kept the law blamelessly. But I threw all these things away. My manhood in Christ consists in none of these. These worldly advantages I counted loss for Christ, and so I value no man for these things. I test him by a different standard. I labor to secure for him other and better things. I know no man after the flesh."

And Paul only puts in another way the words of the Saviour: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." A strict literalist might say: "What, does Christ here teach men to trample upon those sacred domestic ties to which God has given the highest sanction?" Christ, himself, if such a question needs an answer, answered it by being the best of sons, and the most tender and affectionate of friends. What he means is, that these relations, and other similar ones which his disciple sustains toward the world, are all to be subordinated to the higher law of his service. He honored these natural ties, but he plainly foresaw that they *might* clash at some point with duty to him, and so he laid down the law, providing that in every such case the lower relation of husband or son or brother should give way to the higher relation to Christ. If a wife should refuse to go after Christ with her husband, he must go alone, and not refuse to follow him for her sake. If a Jewish father should give his son the alternative

between disinheritance and denying Christ, the son must cleave to Christ. In short, the law of Christ stood ready to take up into itself these human relationships, to sanctify and ennoble them, and make them serve its own divine ends ; but, if they would not submit to be thus taken up, they must give way at every issue to the claims of Christ.

Therefore it was in this sense that Paul knew no man after the flesh. He did not, as an anointed apostle, affect to despise the claims of kindred or of friendship. He loved his country and his countrymen ; but all these things went for nothing when the gospel of Christ was in question. The moment they came into collision with that, they were, to use his own strong words, "counted as refuse." He knew Peter, for instance, after the flesh, as a friend. He respected him as a man of talent and energy ; but the moment that Peter began to compromise the liberty of the gospel, and to yield to the demand of the Judaizers that Christian converts should be circumcised, he withstood him to the face, and openly rebuked his cowardice before the brethren.

Thus much for the negative side of the subject. We have seen how Paul did not know men after the flesh. How, then, did he know them ?

The answer is found in the two verses just preceding, which ought to be carefully studied in connection with the text. Let us read them : "For the love of Christ constraineth us ; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead : and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth

live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. *Wherefore* henceforth know we no man after the flesh." That is to say, the great fact which now regulates my views of men, and my dealings with them, is the fact that Christ died for them to make their lives unselfish and Christlike. I look at a man first as a man whom Christ died to save and purify. My first great question concerning him respects not his circumstances, but his character as related to Christ. Is he a saved man? Has he died to self? Is he living unto him who died for him and rose again? According to the answer to this question I count him safe or in danger; happy or miserable; rich or poor. If he be not a Christian, the chief element of sympathy between him and me is lacking. If he be not a Christian, the chief object of my labors must be to bring him to Christ with penitence and faith. He may be rich in goods, high in honor, endowed with intellectual gifts, abounding in friends, strict in religious formalities; but these things are of the flesh, and I know no man after the flesh.

Is there anything unnatural or fanatical in this? When a man stands in some peculiar relation to a great event, what an interest he assumes in our eyes. The commonest soldier who rode in the charge of the six hundred at Balaklava, would draw to himself the eyes of the proudest assembly in England. A few months ago a political convention nominated for the presidency of this nation a man of whom the great mass of the population knew nothing, but from the

moment his name was flashed along the wires, how the eyes of the whole nation, of all parties, were turned upon him; what an interest attached to all the items of his personal history, to his personal habits, to his domestic life.

Shall we then challenge the interest aroused in such a man as Paul toward the meanest and obscurest of mankind, when he wakes up to the fact that that soul is directly contemplated by such a stupendous event as the death of Jesus Christ—that those groans, that streaming blood, that agony of cross and thorn and spear, were directly and distinctly for that man's salvation? Shall we challenge Paul's interest, I say? Ah, the interest reaches far higher than Paul. The most wretched pagan creature in the remotest island of the sea does not weep tears of penitence for his sins, that heaven is not aglow with rapture. The whole circle of heavenly intelligences is drawn into the circle of that fact, and rejoices over it. The Bible, at least, does not tell us of heaven's joy over any worldly success or triumph. Heaven's interest in man is essentially a moral interest. There is no hint of joy in heaven over the birth of the heir to any earthly crown; over the acquisition of the largest fortune. But the moment a soul moves to put itself in right relation to God through Christ, that moment heaven thrills.

Now let us bring the apostle's thought home to ourselves. What is it that most interests us in the men around us? We know very well that we are naturally inclined to look upon them chiefly as they

stand related to our self-interest, or to our personal affection, or to our pride in their success. We consider whether their personal qualities are agreeable or otherwise; whether their learning will minister to our culture, or their accomplishments to our entertainment. Or we ask, "What is their pedigree? In what circle do they move? What are they worth? How much do they signify "on change?" In how many of our minds are such questions overtopped by the great, vital question, "Do they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ?" How many of us have ceased to know them after the flesh, and see them first and chiefly as immortal souls, shapers of destinies, makers of character, radiators of influence, possible sharers of heavenly glory, possible aliens from the presence of God?

There are our children. The natural fleshy relation thrusts itself into the foreground. The thought which first forces itself upon us is that they are *ours*, "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh." The first period of their lives emphasizes the fleshy relation, calling, as it does, almost exclusively for fleshy ministries, for the tender care and nourishment of the infant body; for the piloting of the infant life among the quicksands of disease and accident; and as infancy develops into childhood and youth, these fleshy claims multiply. Not only food and drink and clothing, but education, intellectual culture, preparation for business, providing of capital, forming right connections, press themselves upon our attention. Rightly enough, if we take heed of the danger which



lurks in these, if we do not let these swallow up all other considerations, if we do not put these first. For if Christ be right, the thing which most concerns our children is precisely the thing which most concerns us—their right relation to the Lord who bought them. Their life is wrong along its whole line, increasingly wrong, if it do not start from God in Christ. If they are ours, they are His before they become ours, and it is a strange oversight indeed, if we overlook His proprietorship. Not, I repeat, that we are to make light of the demands of their bodies and of their minds, but all these ministries must be brought into the sphere of one controlling motive, that is, that they should not live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again. This higher sphere of ministry will not only include all necessary lower ministries, but will prompt them, regulate them, keep them in their place, and make them contribute most effectively to perfect manhood.

Or look at those who minister to our minds, the creators of our science and literature. How shall we know them? Are they out of the range of this precept to know no man after the flesh, because they deal with mind rather than with matter? Are cultured men necessarily good men, or is knowledge so spiritual a thing that the taint of the flesh cannot reach it? Not so, indeed. We shall know these masters of thought after the flesh, if we shall know them only as the enlargers of our worldly knowledge, and the trainers of our natural reason, and if we do not look beyond to see what they can do for charac-



ter. Literature is not exempt from Christian ministry. Men of thought are not out of the sphere of the command, "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Genius and culture, if they obey Christ's law, must fall in with all other agencies to make men morally better; and they fulfil God's purpose just to the degree in which they issue in character. What I mean then is, that our communion with great minds through books, all our reading and study, is to be looked at from this standpoint, and not merely as a means to our knowing more and becoming more popular or more successful in the world: that we should learn to choose our authors with a view first to the building up of our characters, and to the making ourselves moral forces in society. We read much in these days, and knowledge passes for so good and pure a thing in itself, that we are in danger of forgetting that, like other things, it will develop selfish, godless, fleshly properties, if it be not sanctified by Christ's touch.

Or there are our neighbors. We know them after the flesh—as good friends, delightful companions, useful helpers. We meet and exchange comments on stocks and banking. We discuss books and pictures. We are anxious for them if a wife or a child is sick, and deeply sympathizing when death or disaster comes to their home. Yet how far beyond the flesh does our interest reach? Do we not often ignore the fact which overarches all these things, the fact that they are immortal souls, on their way to Christ's judgment-seat, laid by Christ's death under the most sol-

em moral obligations, their most vital interests hanging on their acceptance or rejection of Christ's offered sacrifice, the great destinies of character bound up with their relation to that fact? Do we know them at all in this sense? Do we know whether they are children of God or not? Have we ever sought to know? Do we care whether they are sharers in the grace of life, or strangers to the immortal hope of the gospel? Where is the practical demonstration of our professed faith that the kingdom of God and His righteousness have the right to the first place in man's life? What does our acceptance of Christ's sacrifice mean to us, if it does not commit us to knowing men first, not after the flesh, but as subjects of redeeming love and power?

And again, as regards ourselves. There is a man or a woman whom we know—not yet as a realized creation, but as something away on before us—the creature of our hope and desire, the ideal man or woman in short who we would fain be. We have drawn the portrait for ourselves many a time, and each time have added some new line or some fresh tint. What then is our ideal of manhood? Is this ideal which we have come to know so well, merely a thing of the flesh? Already, my young friend, you have marked out a career for yourself. Perhaps you see yourself in fancy a man to whose power the world bows, a woman whose mark on society is deep. But supposing your ideal realized, I ask you what it is to which the world is to bow? Are you first, to represent to it wealth, intellect, beauty, or character? Is

your ideal man the literary man, the man of pleasure, the man of capital? Is your ideal woman the woman of fashion? Ah! if that be so, you are leaving out that which God would put first; just that very thing which Christ so yearned to bring into your life, that he gave his life for you. Your ideal man of the flesh carries the seeds of death and corruption in him. You may reach your ideal indeed; but you will reach it only to find that the ideal itself is debased, that manhood or womanhood which leaves out of itself consecration, ministry, sacrifice, self-death, is of the poorest quality, and to learn, with bitter disappointment, that "he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption."

And yet, as we have already hinted, the apostle's principle does not take us out of the sphere of natural affection, nor destroy the ordinary relations of life. The gospel law does indeed insist on being supreme over all these, and on regulating them all; and in the event of an issue between it and them, they must give way. But if they will come under its absolute dictation, there is no human affection that will not be ennobled and deepened; no relation of life which will not be dignified and enriched. A man will be none the less a patriot for being a Christian. The spirit of Christ may refine and correct his patriotism; it may make it less feverish and more intelligent; but it will deepen the sentiment itself; and when that man strikes for his country, conscience and love to God will set his patriotism on fire and make him strong and terrible. See how this very Paul loved

his countrymen, even while he was fighting with all his power their perverted patriotism, their national exclusiveness and intolerance. Where, in all literature, is there the expression of a nobler, deeper patriotism than in his words to the Romans? "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites." This from the man who knows no man after the flesh. The husband and wife who, to their mutual human love add the new interest in each other's souls awakened by the spirit of God, know, for the first time, the full sweetness of conjugal affection. Their whole life is lifted to a higher plane; they are drawn together by the common pursuit of new aims, by their interest in new duties, and by their common joy in the love of Christ. The son who forsakes father and mother to give his life to the heathen, reaches, through that very sacrifice for Christ's sake, the very highest grade of filial love, even as the affection of the parents who surrender him is infinitely exalted. A new sacredness of love gathers around that which we have wholly given to Christ. I have never seen this so beautifully illustrated as in the life of John Coleridge Pattieson, the English Bishop of Melanesia. In his early manhood he gave himself to the work of the gospel in the islands of the Pacific. The affection between himself and his father was singularly strong. He was the prop of his father's age, the very light of his eyes; and when his wish was first made known,

the old man's heart was well-nigh broken. He exclaimed: "I can't let him go:" and then faith came to the rescue, and he caught back the words, saying: "God forbid I should stop him. I give him wholly, not with any thought of seeing him again. I will not have him thinking he must come home again to see me." He never did come home. He labored there for seventeen years, and six years ago was killed during a visit to one of the islands, but the love between father and son grew, through that mutual sacrifice, into something almost too sacred to be committed to the pages of a book. The father, in his letters to friends, expresses his growing thankfulness that he gave him to the heathen. The son enlists the father's heart in the work, and begs him, in case he should survive him, to give his inheritance to the mission. He writes home, after five years of absence: "The first freshness of my loss is not felt now. But I think I love them all and you all better than ever; and I trust that I am looking inward on the whole to the blessedness of our meeting hereafter." And on the evening after his consecration as bishop, he writes: "Oh, my dear, dear father, God will bless you for all your love to me, and your love to Him in giving me to His service."

"Wherefore, henceforth know we no man after the flesh." My brethren, is this the utterance of a vain enthusiasm, or of an ignorant fanaticism? You know that he who spake it was no ignorant child of impulse, but one of God's strong men, ripe in wisdom, thorough in discipline, profoundly versed in the knowledge of

men, and as wary and cautious as he was ardent. His life is on record for us as a practical comment upon this principle; and it requires no laborious study to discover that his first and highest consideration in dealing with men was their relation to his crucified Lord. Whatever else men were to him, they were first of all subjects of Christ's dying love. Whatever else he might desire for them, he longed and labored before all to bring them through repentance and faith into living union with him who died for them and rose again. And if it was practicable for him to live and work by that law, is it not equally practicable for us? Can we, dare we as Christians look upon men from any lower point of view? What does our church fellowship in the name of Christ mean, if it do not mean that we know men first of all in their relations to Christ? What do we exist for, if it be not to carry this truth? The true church of Christ is no fleshly body; it is a spiritual body with Christ as its head. It does not work healthfully, according to its primal organic law, if its energy in every part is not concentrated upon bringing men into right relations with Christ, and developing those relations when formed. We are not to know men after the flesh. We are not banded together for our common entertainment, for the gratification of our curiosity, for the excitement of transient emotion, for the encouragement of religious sensuousness, for the promotion of social or professional ambitions—for no such fleshly ends are we a church. We are to look upon society as something which is to be brought into



the spirit and life of Christ. We are to look upon absence from Christ as the root of all human misery. We are to look upon the gospel of Christ as the only agency which goes to the root of human sin and of human need, and, abandoning all human schemes of moral reform, we must cleave to the gospel and the gospel only, wielding it with all the might which God shall give us, in the settled assurance that it is the power of God unto salvation. But we shall not do this until we cease to know men after the flesh. We shall not work the appliances of the gospel at their highest power, until the conviction has taken deep root in our hearts that society's first and greatest need is Christ. May God fill us with the sense of this need. May He help us to concentrate our energy upon the highest development of the gospel agencies at our command. I do believe, yea, I know, that the church of this day is scattering and wasting her power, under the delusion that society has many needs; whereas all its needs are summed up in one. One work is before us, and only one. That belongs not to outside forces, not to reform associations, but to the church of Jesus Christ, which is "his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all:" that work is to preach the gospel of faith and repentance to men and to live it ourselves. If we do this, the church will be as a fruitful vine.



MEAT OR DRUDGERY.

JOHN IV.

(34) Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work.

## XVII.

### MEAT OR DRUDGERY.

CHRIST was resting from his journey at the well of Samaria. He was alone ; his disciples having gone into the city to procure refreshment. Weary though he was, however, he would not lose the opportunity to "win a soul." His repose was soon broken by the approach of a woman of the city who had come out to draw water. Undeterred by her ignorance, her degradation, her superstitious prejudices, he unfolded to her the great central truth of spiritual religion.

In his holy zeal he seems to have forgotten for the time his weariness and hunger ; so that when his disciples returned with food, and urged him to partake, he replied, "I have meat to eat which ye know not of ;" and when he saw that they understood his words literally, and supposed that some one had brought him food in their absence, he explained himself by showing them how "a higher spiritual joy had suspended all sense of a lower bodily necessity." He did not mean that he was sustained by a miracle. The woman had hurried back to the town, and had told her story with such power that crowds were already streaming out of the gate and hastening to the well. "As his thirst," to use another's words,

“had been not so much after the water of Jacob's well as after her conversion who had come to draw water thence, so now his hunger is not for the food which they have prepared, but for those whom he beholds already hastening from the neighboring city, that they may hear and receive his word.”<sup>1</sup> This was what he meant by the words, “my meat is to do the will of Him that sent me.” The lesson which he wished to give the disciples, and which is our lesson to-day, was the satisfying joy which lies in duty.

But let us not, in the first place, mistake our Lord's words as some have done, as exalting activity to the neglect of the conditions of the spiritual life, as if the words “my meat is to *do*,” set forth the whole of Christianity. A little study of the conversation with the woman will guard us against this error. She was under a kindred mistake. She thought that religion consisted in observance; she must worship God on Gerizim and not on Moriah; she must have nothing to do with Jews. She thought that the deepest need of her life could be relieved by some magical water which this stranger possessed, so that she should no longer feel thirst, nor be troubled with the daily drudgery of drawing water. Jesus showed her, by using the well itself as a figure, that what she needed, first of all, was a new principle of life in her soul; not a change of *circumstances*, but a change of *character*; and what he then said to her he says to us, namely, that we must *be* right before

---

<sup>1</sup> Trench, “Studies in the Gospels.”

our *doing* will be right ; that it is only the man in whose heart God dwells, who does the will of God ; that the active outflowings of the life must spring from that fountain of water which is *in* every true child of faith, springing up into everlasting life.

The tendency of religious thought for some years past has been to exalt work. This has grown in part out of the enormous needs which have forced themselves on the attention of Christians, and partly out of a reaction from a morbid, self-contemplative, brooding, and speculative type of piety. In many ways this reaction was healthful. It stimulated the church to enterprise and liberality, made her more aggressive, and more familiar with the world's needs. On the other hand, it tended and ran to a dangerous extreme. In the vigor and variety of action, the true motive power of Christian action fell into the shade. In their zeal to *do*, men forgot that out of their *hearts* were the issues of life, and neglected to keep their hearts with all diligence. They began to substitute work for prayer, and sometimes to cajole conscience with the poetic prettiness that "to labor is to pray." And it came to pass thus that many a man concealed real spiritual poverty, prayerlessness, uneasiness of conscience, want of peace with God, under stirring activity in Christian enterprise. Under cover of this terrible fallacy, legitimate impulses to duty were being weakened while so-called duty was being done. Men were building reputations for Christian activity upon foundations which were rotting beneath them. They were conducting Sunday-schools, and organiz-

ing societies, and promoting conventions, saying "Lord, Lord," and doing many wonderful works, when they knew not the secret of the Lord. You are seeing some of the fruits of that fallacy now. The tests of these awful days are probing deeper than men's activities. They are cutting down into the secret places of character. It is coming to light how much so-called religious energy was the fruit of natural enthusiasm and love of action, of the instinct of organizing and leading, and how much of true love and faith and solid, godly principle.

Therefore, in discussing this passage we must not lose sight of its connection with what precedes. It does set forth to us Jesus as a worker, but it equally sets forth the work as the natural outcome of a soul at one with God. It does hold up to us doing as the very meat of a child of God, but it is a doing which is impelled by a will informed throughout by the will of God.

This being guarded, we may now go on to the specific truth of the text, which is that Christ is our example in finding a perfect joy in duty. The practical question which is thrust upon us is, WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DUTY AS MEAT AND DUTY AS DRUDGERY?

You are perfectly familiar with this difference in ordinary life. We probably have all known what it is to do a thing faithfully and persistently, because it must be done, without having any interest in it beyond getting it out of the way as quickly as possible. You have seen a man whose education and tastes fit

him for literary pursuits and society, plodding over a set of books, or selling goods over a counter, because it was a matter of bread. You know how Charles Lamb has interpreted that fearful sense of drudgery in his little essay, "The Superannuated Man," the story of his final deliverance from the book-keeper's desk, after thirty-six years, in which the wood had "eaten into his soul." You recognize the contrast at once with a man whose business is the congenial element of his life ; who rejoices in the contact with men, the rivalry of trade, the keen encounter of wits, and the sense of power in handling great financial or mercantile combinations.

A man whose heart is really in a thing always has a large surplus in his doing. There is a wide margin around the limits of his necessary tasks. He is so full of the thing that he inevitably runs over on all sides. There, for instance, are two students of chemistry. One of them goes through the text-books and lectures because his course of study requires it. He learns what is set him, while he would much rather be studying the classics or history ; and he passes his examination without censure, but without special credit. You ask the professor about the other student, and his eye kindles. "That fellow ! Why, chemistry is meat and drink to him. It is hard for me to give him enough to do. He keeps ahead of the lectures all the time." And as you watch the young man, you see that he is forever hanging about the chemical lecture-room. He is on intimate terms with the professor. He stays after hours, and asks questions.



You go to his room, and you find that he has set up a laboratory of his own, and is dabbling in acids and working over retorts every spare moment he can get. It is just as much his *duty* as his fellow-student's to complete the chemical course ; but the duty is meat to him, while it is mere drudgery to the other.

You recognize the same difference in the religious life of two men. There is one of them who never fails in any duty, so far as you can discover. His contributions are regularly given, he is regularly present at the services of the church, he is punctilious in doing the work assigned him, he is regular in family worship. Do not understand me to despise all this. Far from it. It is excellent, praiseworthy, and the man is worthy of high respect and confidence. And yet you miss in him the sense of exuberance. You do not feel that duty moves under an over-mastering pressure. No enthusiasm seems to get into his accurately drawn squares of moral obligation. He reminds you of a neat, tightly-made cask, which gives out its contents at just such a point and at just such a rate when you turn the faucet. But now and then you meet a man who reminds you of one of those wayside reservoirs which you come upon now and then on country roads. You hear the gurgle of the stream as it comes down from the hill above the road, mingling with the voice of the breezy pines, and running into its reservoir with a current that keeps the water forever trembling and bubbling, and the old, mossy trough is always brimming ; there are always little streams trickling down the sides and forming

pools underneath, and here and there you find a crevice where a jet comes spouting out under the strong pressure which strains the oaken sides. So you find this man equally punctilious with the other, yet more than punctilious, doing all that is required, yet bubbling over into spontaneous activity, carrying into the forms of duty something which fills them out and makes the duties themselves look richer.

Again I ask, what makes the difference? What makes duty meat to one man, and drudgery to another? You certainly will not find the difference in the character of the duties; because if that were so, you would find joyful workers only in spheres congenial to themselves; and you know that that is very far from being the case. No doubt a man may find joy in congenial work, simply because the work is congenial. If an astronomer is fortunate enough to get a position in a grand observatory, there is nothing strange in his enjoying his duties. The gospel does not deny that fact, but neither is it especially concerned with it. The problem of the gospel is when the astronomer does not get his position in the observatory; when he cannot give his life to the study which he loves; when he must spend his days in teaching arithmetic to schoolboys or in casting up dreary columns of figures at the desk of a bank. The question is, must all joy go out of duty *then*? Must the man's work cease to be meat and become drudgery?

Take Christ's life, for example. Christ was pre-eminently a worker. He went about doing. He

said, "I must work while it is called to-day." Nobody who knows anything of the character of our Lord can for a moment suppose that his mission was a pleasant one in itself considered. Confronting arrogant priests and sneering Pharisees, pressed by the filthy Oriental rabble, one thrusting forward his blind and inflamed eyes, another his distorted limbs, the epileptic falling in fearful convulsions at his feet, the madman menacing him with frantic gestures and rending the air with his howls; mingling with men who did not comprehend his plans and who were out of sympathy with his spirit, there was nothing in all this congenial to a nature so perfectly attuned as Christ's.

And yet you can nowhere discover in the Lord's life the faintest sign that his work was done under the mere pressure of obligation. Every point at which it is studied, confirms his words in the text: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me." He wrought as a man who loved his work. He carried into it all the glowing zeal which burned in the talk with the Samaritan by the well. He was always about his Father's business as one who had no other and no dearer interest.

You see the same thing in Paul. He makes no secret of the fact that the line of his duty is not a pleasant one; and yet along this line runs a parallel current of hearty, joyful enthusiasm. "If," he writes to the Philippians, "I be poured as a libation upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." Sorrowful he is, yet always re-

joining; poor, yet making many rich; dying, and behold he lives. No man can read the history and epistles of Paul without saying, "Here is a man who loves his work, who lives in his work, to whom duty is meat."

It is now time to point out the secret of this; the touchstone which converts drudgery into meat; which makes a man find a hearty satisfaction in duty as duty, irrespective of its peculiar nature.

As you read the text, you observe that Christ places his satisfaction in the fact of *carrying out a commission*—of doing another's will. Elsewhere he says, "I came not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me;" and here, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me and to finish *His* work." By laying the emphasis there, we strike the secret of enthusiasm in duty. Christ's joy in duty lay in the fact that the duty was his Father's work and his Father's will. No matter what form the duty might take, the fact that it was part of his Father's plan, and assigned him by his Father, was enough to make it his meat to do it. This kindled the flame of zeal. This made him forgetful of hunger and weariness. This carried him over the pain and repulsiveness which so often were bound up with the duty. The living fountain of his enthusiasm lay not in the task itself, but in his relation to God, which carried all tasks along with it. And that must be our starting-point if we shall ever know to the full the joy of duty. All specific duties must be swept into the current of one, absorbing, affectionate desire to do the will of God. Then

the joy of each specific duty will depend not upon its being an agreeable duty, but simply and solely upon the fact that, in doing it, our Father's will is done.

Look at the fifteenth of John, and you see how Christ carries out this thought and enforces it upon his disciples. In the first place, doing is emphasized. "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." Then doing is referred to its proper root—the relation of friendship between Christ and the disciple. "Henceforth I call you not servants, . . . but I have called you friends." According as the relation shall be that of a friend or of a servant, the doing will be either meat or drudgery. Let me try to illustrate this. Let us suppose a father, a man of large wealth, to have an only son who is about to marry and to establish a home of his own. The father's hope and love are bound up in that son. He proceeds to build for him a beautiful house on an estate near his own, and to fill it with everything that can gratify the eye and the taste, or minister to the comfort of the young husband and wife. And in all these preparations he is aided by an old and dearly loved friend, the companion of his school days, and the intimate of his riper years. He hides nothing from this friend. He takes him into all his counsels, he tells him all his plans for his son's happiness. And the friend is as much interested as the father himself. He gives up his time freely. He goes about with the father into all kinds of places and in all kinds of weather, to look at land or to consult architects. He never thinks of incon-

venience or trouble. Evening after evening you may see the two gray heads bending over plans or title deeds. The thought which masters him, and which makes him forgetful of himself is—My dear friend has a purpose in which his heart is bound up ; what can I do to help him carry it out ?

Now, on the other hand, there are the architect, and the masons and carpenters and furnishers. They do not know the old father. They do not care whether his son brings home his bride or not ; whether he have a house, or go to live in lodgings. They know and care nothing about the old man's tender affection or about his plans for his son's happiness. They are merely servants, hired for so much to do a certain work. You may see through this simple illustration the footing upon which Christ meant to put all his followers, when he said, "Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth ; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." The Christian's relation to his Lord is that of the Father's friend, in sympathy with his plans, possessed of the secret of the Lord ; it is not that of the servant who knows not and cares not what the Father is doing, except as it puts money into his pocket.

I have drawn out this contrast at length, because in it lies the difference between duty as meat and duty as drudgery. The true basis of Christian life and work is friendship—confidential friendship with Christ. It is of these friends that he says, "I have



chosen you and ordained you that you should bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain."

In such a friendship, a man not only learns something of Christ's plans and desires for him and for the world, but gets, through his love, into perfect sympathy with them; so that the carrying out of these plans becomes the staple work, and the sustained enthusiasm of his life. He accepts his duty and his position as alike parts of his Father's plan. It is not that the specific duty is any pleasanter or any harder; but that the pleasantness and the hardness are taken up into the grand motive of doing God's pleasure. Such a man does not look upon duty and pleasure as antagonists. He does not fence off duty from pleasure. Not a few people engage in duty as a school-boy pursues his studies, looking out longingly through five days in the week for the Saturday holiday. To him everything is subordinate to the holidays, and the intervening duties form a disagreeable necessity, which is to be gotten over as best he can, and under a kind of silent protest. In Christian living, duty and pleasure do not belong apart. Neither thrives in a state of divorce. Pleasure degenerates into sin, and duty into drudgery. Christ means that his followers should find joy in duty; that as duty must needs be the staple of the life, the life should be joyful; that his true followers should be able to say with himself, "I delight to do Thy will."

Some of you may think that I preach to you a great deal about duty. I do. If I am in earnest to have you friends of Christ, I cannot preach too much



about it, for I read his own words, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." I know that duty must needs make up by far the larger share of your life and of mine, and therefore I would have it propelled from the right point, and informed with the right principle. And I am sure that the church at large has great need of the lesson conveyed by these words of the Master. Duty appeals to too many souls as drudgery, and therefore carries with it a temptation to evade it. Too many people set before them as their end in life, the having a "good time," as they express it, which means following their own inclinations and seeking their own pleasure; and they practically regard all duty as an interference with this. I am sure that God means that His children should be happy; but I am equally sure that the man who takes that view of happiness will never find it. Happiness, if it is to be found at all in this world, will be found along the path of duty. The men who hurry over the spaces between their selfish pleasures miss the best of their lives. They are like a traveller who has come to see the beauties of our country, and who is so anxious to get to Albany that he takes a sleeping-carriage, and loses all the beautiful scenery of the Hudson. There is a better way than this—a way which has the recommendation of Christ's word and of Christ's example. When I hold up to you this text, it is not your sentence to a round of drudgery. It is your passport over a road which Christ's feet have trodden, and where he, at least, found the purest blessedness and the most joyful satisfaction. Then again, too

much Christian duty is done painfully and wearily. There is too much fretting over it. One is not satisfied with his place ; another, with his success ; another, with the kind of work he has to do. One thinks he does not get his deserts at men's hands. Another, that he has to bear an undue share of burdens ; and so the way which God meant should be sunny and full of songs, is clouded by these rising vapors of discontent, and is full of the voices of murmuring. Service is moved too much by the attractiveness of the duty, and not enough by the impulsion of love. It picks and chooses duty according to rules and preferences of its own, instead of being swept onward to all duty by the master thought, "I am the friend of Christ." So long as Christians live only by a code of rules, so long duty will be drudgery and not meat ; so long it will be upon the basis of service rather than of friendship. It will take on a new and brighter and nobler aspect, only when each life shall be thrilled with the love of a personal Christ ; only when duty ceases to be a dry, hard code, and becomes identified with the free-will offering of a burning devotion to the Lord who bought us. What we need in the church of Christ is a *swing* behind duty, like the power which sends the billows of the Atlantic steadily, rank after rank, against the cliffs.

Man and church ought to be moving, like the crusaders of old, under the battle-cry, "God wills it!" and with a sympathy with God's purpose to save our poor lost race, as intense as that which drew the crusading hosts to the gates of Jerusalem.

And I repeat it, this power and impulse in duty will come only with the fresh baptism of the spirit of love to Christ. Men must love Christ before they will love duty. They must be in sympathy with Christ before they will find duty to be meat, instead of drudgery. Each man must see himself as commissioned to do the will of Him that sent him, before his discontent with his place or his work will be swallowed up in his desire to do that will.

And he who moves out from this standpoint will find that the new impulse not only propels, but lifts him. It will take him out of the sphere of little, nicely-adjusted measurements of duty, and set him moving in the larger order of a free man in Christ Jesus. It will put all the apparent pettiness and fragmentariness of his life in direct relation with Christ and with God's great saving plans; and thus there will be a sense of power behind his smallest service which will double its effect. Often, as I have been drifting in my boat through the summer days along the ocean coast, I have been struck with the way in which the fulness and power of the ocean impressed itself upon every single foot of the water. Go close up to the rocks, select a little cove, hardly large enough for a sea-bird to float in, and shut off the surrounding water from your eyes. You never could mistake the ebb and flow in that little cove for anything but an ocean tide. There is something in the tremendous suction which draws the water back, something in the slow, majestic fulness with which it rises, that can only come from the swing of the sea. You would per-

ceive the difference in a moment, if you were taken to the largest and deepest reservoir. And so, when Christian life throughout the church shall have gotten behind it the infinite sweep of the love of Christ, the power will be felt in the smallest Christian service. The great tide will move in every little creek and bay and cleft of duty, and the world shall hear its voice as the sound of many waters.

This, then, is the sum of what I have said. Our Christian lives are lives of service. Shall the service be to us meat or drudgery? The choice lies with us. Christ has the secret of joyful, enthusiastic service, but if he can truly say to us: "I have meat to eat which ye know not of," he is nevertheless not disposed to keep the secret to himself. He gives it to you in a word. Fall into your place as his friend and not as his servant. Get your impulse from love, and not from obligation. Identify your will with his, your work with his work, your interest with that of his kingdom, and then, and not till then you can truly say with him: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work."

THE LESSON OF MOSES' ROD.

EXODUS IV.

(2) And the Lord said unto him : What is that in thine hand? and he said, A rod.

## XVIII.

### THE LESSON OF MOSES' ROD.

IN our study of the men of Scripture, we are constantly impressed with the fact that they are men of like passions with ourselves. Even the heroic men are only men after all, subject to the same temptations, weakness, and error which beset us. Moses, for example, is one of the grandest of the men of old, yet we cannot help seeing his infirmity of temper; the hot and hasty spirit which ran before it was sent, which imperilled the cause of the people by the slaying of the Egyptian, and which proved that he needed the long solitude of Horeb to mellow him, and to fit him for that leadership for which no man can ever be regarded as wholly fit who cannot rule himself. Then, too, for one who had had such close intercourse with God, it seems strange that he should exhibit such weakness of faith and such reluctance to obey. One would think that a man would not dare to hesitate, much less to remonstrate, when a voice spoke to him out of the midst of that visible miracle—the bush burning, but not consumed. Yet we hear him saying, first, “Who am I?” As if that were any business of his. Then, “they will not hearken to my voice.” Suppose they would not. What was that to him? God



Himself has spoken to men ere now, and they have refused to listen. Suppose God's purpose, so far as Moses was concerned, was to be fulfilled simply in Moses' speaking. What was there for him to do but to speak? His obedience was not to be conditioned upon the peoples' hearing or refusing to hear. And then, after God had wrought a miracle to encourage his faith, he must needs raise the question of his eloquence. Did he suppose for a moment that God did not know his lack of eloquence as well as he did? Did he suppose that an eloquent man was necessary to carry out God's will? How did he know but that the fact that he was not eloquent was the very reason why God wanted him for that position? It is not hard to see why God's anger was kindled against Moses, not merely because of these individual errors, but because of the root out of which they sprang, and which underlies all the similar and so frequent errors on our part, namely: that ignorance of God and consequent want of faith in Him which lead us to fix the measure of power and the character of the agents necessary to do what God commands to be done; the measuring of divine possibilities by human standards.

Here was Moses, for instance, summoned by God to undertake the work of opening His great design of deliverance to Israel, and to be the main agent in carrying it out. The thing lay in Moses' mind thus: "This is a stupendous undertaking. The leader of this people must be a wise and a ready man. He who would persuade this people must be a fluent speaker."

The thing lay in God's mind (reverently speaking) thus: "I desire Moses to undertake this work. I know his strength and his weakness, but his strength or his weakness are nothing to Me. I am behind him, and this work is to be My doing, not his; and whatever he may need to do My will, I can give him." As for Moses' eloquence, it afterward appeared that God did not need Moses' tongue at all. He had Aaron whom he could and did employ for the purpose; and if He had not had Aaron, nor a single speaker in the whole nation of Israel, He could have done His own speaking in His own unmistakable way.

This obedience, irrespective of our own estimates of power or weakness, success or failure, is the universal rule laid down for God's workmen. The fact once established that God commands a thing to be done, and commands you or me to do it,—our estimate of personal qualifications, of the probability or possibility of success or failure, of the measure or mode of power necessary to accomplish the work, are to be absolutely laid aside. The fact that a man is without the qualifications which appear needful to him, may be the very reason why God chooses him. Men somehow fall into the feeling that God is arranging matters for *their* glory; whereas He is arranging, in every case, for His own glory. God does not care whether you and I are great men, or not. He does care that our life and work shall set Him forth to men as a great God; and if they can be made to see this any better by His using a feeble and contemptible

man, instead of one to whose genius and power society looks for great things, we need not be surprised at His choosing such a man ; and the man himself has nothing to say about the matter, but is simply to suffer himself to be used, and to leave all the rest to God.

If, then, we once get firmly hold of this truth, we shall understand why God often turns our thoughts away from the great plans and the elaborate machinery which we had determined to be necessary, and bids us use some familiar thing, or work in some well-worn, commonplace track which had sunk entirely out of our sight in the shadow of the great thing to be done. While Moses was thinking and talking about eloquent speech, God said to him, "What is that in thy hand?" Only a rod, his shepherd's crook, a stick cut from a common bush, a thing to which his hand had become so used that he carried it unconsciously. Only a rod ; but why that question? What can I do with the rod? Nothing, perhaps. The question is not at all what *you* can do with it. In your hand it would be nothing ; but now cast it out of your hand. Throw it upon the ground, and see what it will do in *My* hand. And lo, that thing so familiar to Moses, that thing which he never would have dreamed could have any connection with the work to which he had been called, that rod became a lithe serpent ; and Moses fled from it in terror. God's touch could make a fearful and wonderful thing out of a contemptible stick. And when God put it back into Moses' hand, Moses had

gained a new respect for that common thing ; and he took with it the assurance conveyed by the miracle that he was no more to wield that staff as Moses the shepherd, but as Moses the agent and representative of God.

This, then, is the truth which every Christian worker needs to get by heart : that human power and human agencies, when God uses them, cease to be limited in their operation by human measurements. They are lifted up into another plane, and work under the larger laws of God's omnipotence. ✓

And this fact, if we only knew it, is a very familiar one to us, I mean on its lower side. That is to say, we all know how often a thing or a person develops a new and higher value, and a larger range of resources simply by passing into a skilful hand, and by receiving the impress of another mind and will.

There is a lump of clay, for instance. It cannot rustle and wave and shade like a tree ; it cannot emit perfume like a flower ; it cannot afford refreshment like a fruit. All it can do is to lie still and be clay, until it passes into the hand of some one. The potter finds it, and throws it upon his wheel, and shapes it, and puts it into the fire ; and it comes forth to be an ornament in a king's house, or a daily blessing beside the poor man's well.

Or, to go a little higher, into the sphere of human life, there is an ignorant clown. Leave him in his own hands, and the best he can do will be to turn over the glebe, and to eat and sleep like the ox he drives. Yet put him into another's hands. Let the

drill-sergeant take him in hand ; let him move in the ranks under the word of a wise general, and he may help decide the destinies of a state.

The principle, in short, lies at the bottom of all education. Teachers and schools, and text-books, and the whole machinery of education, assume that man cannot be all that he is capable of being, so long as he remains in his own hands ; that he must be taken in hand by higher culture, and superior knowledge and experience, and get their stamp upon him before he can become a power in society.

What then ? Shall we say that it is strange or unnatural, when common things and common men develop such power under the touch of a competent hand, that the same things and men, passing into God's hand, should reveal powers and be turned to uses which astonish the world ?

Yet this is the lesson of which Scripture is full ; upon which Scripture history is one continuous comment. It is "not by might nor by power, but by My spirit," saith the Lord. Out of weakness men are made strong. One chases a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight ; the shepherd's crook becomes a rod of power ; a great tree arises from a grain of seed ; mountains are moved by faith ; "the things which are," are brought to naught by "things which are not."

This general principle being established, it follows that the first condition of its operation in the individual man is *self-surrender*, or putting himself out of his own hands, and putting himself absolutely, and with-



out any reserve, into God's hands. Doing this, he has the assurance that his power will be made the very most of, while he renounces all right to say what power of his shall be used, or how it shall be used, or for what end it shall be used. God may turn aside from the power on which he prides himself most, and use some little capability to which he attaches no importance. God may set him at great work, which he thinks he is not fit for. God may give him small and obscure work, when he thinks he is competent to great things. God may do by incidental work of his, more than he could by all his carefully-laid plans. God may use only a stick, where he thought the work required eloquence.

All that he leaves with God. His office is simply to obey; working when and where God bids him, and using the tools God tells him to use, no matter how ridiculously inadequate they may seem to bring about the end proposed.

A man who thus gives up his power into God's hands, is like one who gives up his money, which is power of a certain kind, into the hands of a financier. He does not know why his agent buys this stock or sells that. He wonders sometimes why the agent suspects an investment which he himself thought good; or why he attaches so much importance to some little piece of real estate which he would almost have given away. All he knows is that his money increases; that his financial power is doubled by his finances being in other hands than his own.

It is with some natural fear and trembling that one

thus lets go his hold on his old notions of power and weakness ; but when he does, and begins to work on this new principle, his eyes open very rapidly. By the time Moses had brought the plagues upon Egypt, and had seen the Red Sea open a path for the host, and close again over their pursuers, and had seen the bare, dry rock flow with water at the touch of his rod, he must have gotten a quite new conception of the possibilities of a shepherd's staff with God's power behind it. He was too wise to bestow any superstitious reverence upon the staff itself ; and yet that common stick must have acquired a dignity and interest in his eyes from the fact of its having been God's instrument.

And one object of God's dealing with us is to teach us respect for familiar modes of power. That is one reason why He so often makes use of them. We very naturally fall into the mistaken idea that power which is little in our eyes is not worth using at all. God corrects our mistake by using it. We look upon this or that man, and say he is not worth cultivating. He has no remarkable talent, no special gifts, he is commonplace ; and God every now and then takes one of those commonplace men, whose only merit is faithfully doing his duty in his commonplace ground, and puts him where society is forced to look up to him, and makes him the instrument of work for which society must needs thank him. ✓ We look about us to find something to do to serve God and to enrich the world. We are very ambitious ; we want to do some great thing, and yet, somehow, the time for doing it



does not come ; there are so many little things which come in day by day and prevent our getting at work at the great thing. Meanwhile we have the great thing in mind. It is maturing. We mean to do it some day. These little cares and duties are only interruptions. Our great service to God and to the world is yet to be done. And some day we wake up on a sudden to the fact that we shall never do that great thing ; that some one else has done it ; or that the necessity for doing it has gone by ; and that our service to the world and to God has been made up out of these little daily services which we thought were only incidental to the main current of our life. They turn out to have *formed* the current. Well for us if we have not despised them ; well for us if we have done with our might what our hand found to do, and have not slighted it because we meant to do something greater some day.

Then, too, with this desire and planning to do great things, we begin to think of correspondingly great means. We must be so well equipped ; we must know so much ; we must have such and such apparatus ; and meantime we cannot afford to stop and do the little thing which needs doing to-day, or use the familiar power which has become contemptible by its familiarity. We are saving ourselves up for some great demonstration when we shall be all ready. And God comes to us and dissipates all our dreams of elaborate machinery, by saying : "What is that in thine hand ? Go, use *that* to-day." He is a wise man who does not rebel at that bidding. He may be sure

that God will do more and better with that thing which is in his hand to-day, than he will do with his machinery and his great plans which are still dreams of the future.

Many a man has died a nobody, and has left the world no better than he found it, simply because he thought the mode of power which lay nearest him, and with which he was most familiar, was too insignificant to be used. While he was waiting to nurse some greater power and to develop some greater result, he died, and had done nothing. We have a right to be suspicious of the value of those men who are always telling how much they would do if they were only properly placed, or if they only had such and such tools. An artichoke is the meanest vegetable that grows ; and it is the only vegetable which insists on growing in a garden. An oak will grow anywhere ; and a man's true power and piety too are shown by what he will do where God has placed him, and with the thing that is in his hand. ✕ When Paul's missionary career was stopped, and he was shut up in prison at Rome, he might have said : "I may as well give up all thought of doing anything more." A good man who is suddenly transferred from a wide sphere of activity to a very narrow one, is often tempted in this way. But not so reasoned Paul. "What is that in thine hand, Paul?" "A prætorian soldier chained to my hand ;" and forthwith Paul sets about preaching to these guards, as one after another they take their place at his side ; and by and by we find him writing to the church at Philippi, "My bonds in

Christ are known throughout the prætorian guard." "What are those in thine hand?" "Visitors, members of the Roman church, coming in day after day to talk with me on the mysteries of the faith or the interests of the church;" and again we find him writing, "Many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." Some of these are servants in the imperial household, and so the gospel gets a foothold in the palace of Nero. "What is that in thine hand?" "Only a pen;" but the whole Christian world rejoices to-day in the four Epistles of the Imprisonment.

There is a banking clerk in a German town. God smites him with blindness. Cut off from the means of earning his daily bread, what business has that man to think of doing any philanthropic work? Absolutely nothing in his hand, only a thought in his heart, that a blind man might teach other blind men, and deal with them the better from being a personal sharer of their affliction. That thought grew into the blind school at Illzach, with its printing-office and workshop, and library of books in raised type, and, greatest of all, the German Bible in raised letters, printed in sixty-two volumes, and costing only forty-two dollars. One blind man, thinking his one thought in the dark, opened the Word of God to the blind of all Germany.

What is that in thine hand? The Reverend Mr. McCall, that devoted worker among the poor of Glasgow, and the author of that most interesting little

book, "Among the Masses ; or, Work in the Wynds," relates, that one evening a few young women came to him, saying : " We have been thinking about what you were saying on being doers as well as hearers of the word. We have been praying that the Lord of the harvest may send laborers to the multitude ; meantime, we have come to offer ourselves. We think we might go round to some of the houses with tracts ; and here we have six shillings to pay for them. We hope to give that, at least, every month." They were hard working girls, chiefly engaged in factories or warerooms ; but in a few weeks thirty of them were thus engaged. Sabbath after Sabbath they might be seen entering the church with new followers gathered from the lanes and tenements ; and when the work of Bible-selling among the people of the district was inaugurated, in one year these girls sold no fewer than seven hundred copies of the Word of God. Only six shillings in hand, and a little time taken from hard-earned leisure, for Christ's sake.

Thus God points us to the thing in our hand ; the duty nearest us ; the power of which we are masters ; the opportunity of the present moment ; and bids us make the best and the most of these. It was indeed in a spirit of despondency and desperation that the wise man wrote, " Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might ;" as much as to say, " Whatever you can get, get ; whatever you can do, do. You are on your road to the dark, dismal grave where there is no work nor device ; there is the more reason, therefore, why your journey should be a merry one ;" but

the admiration is none the less sound, viewed in the cheerful light of Christian hope. It is true that life is short; that only to-day is ours; that there is no work nor device nor knowledge in the grave; and that the man who wants to do anything in this world had better do the thing that comes to his hand with the tool that is in his hand. It is right to make plans. It is right and laudable to make the whole life centre in a great and good design. Sometimes God lets a man carry out such a plan; at any rate, whether He does or not, the life is the better for the order and concentration which are thus impressed on it; but it must never be forgotten that along the line of our great plans lie many incidental things, or what seem such to us; and that, when God throws these in our way, He means them to be done. We may think them interruptions now, but they may prove to have furthered our plan. Or, it may be that God shall take one of these apparently incidental things, and make our life centre in that, instead of at the point we had fixed for ourselves. We may legitimately strive to acquire new power, but meanwhile we must not neglect that which is in our hand. The use for the new power may never come. The use for the power in hand may be to-day; and that opportunity says to us, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Thy *hand*: a man, while his mind is preoccupied with something far removed from the place where he is walking up and down, might strike his hand against a little tree, and, looking down, find it something which promised rich and rare fruit on



cultivation ; and thus taking what his hand found, but which did not lie at all in his plans, and setting out his little tree in his garden, he will be eating the fruit, perhaps, when the plan on which he was meditating has been blown to the four winds. So in Christian work. God not unfrequently honors the finding of the hand above the carefully planned product of the brain, in order that we may be taught how great the small and incidental and commonplace things of the world may become by His touch upon them.

How full is Scripture of such illustrations. There is the host of the Midianites and of Amalek in the valley like grasshoppers for multitudes, and here is Gideon, with only three hundred left of all his thousands. Twenty-two thousand fearful men, and nine thousand seven hundred rash men gone at a stroke. Three hundred ; and "what is that in their hand, Gideon ?" "Only an earthen pitcher, a lamp and a trumpet." "Well, Gideon, cease making elaborate plans for battle or for escape. By these shall that vast host be scattered. You never dreamed of lamps, pitchers, and trumpets deciding a campaign, but you shall see what God can do with light and breath and broken earthenware."

In the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and travellers walked through byways for fear of violence and robbery. How shall they be delivered ? "What is that in thine hand, Shamgar ?" "Only an ox-goad ; good for nothing but to drive my oxen." "Perhaps so, Shamgar, in *your* hand, but *I* touch it now. Go forth and use it with God's touch on it ;"

and lo ! six hundred men fall before him, and Israel is delivered with an ox-goad.

And there are the hungry multitudes on the hillside, and the disciples of our Lord in great worry and confusion : "How shall these people be fed?" And Christ answers : "How many loaves have *ye*? What is that in thine hand, little lad?" "Only five loaves and two fishes, but they are nothing." No, not in the lad's hands, not in the disciples' hands, but when Christ says, "bring them to me," the problem is solved. No need of saying "only five loaves," after Christ's hand has been upon them. There is enough and to spare.

So, then, a shepherd's rod gives us our lesson to-day. It is simple and direct to every man, woman, and child who loves and is trying to serve our Lord. The first question as you enter upon service is, not what power do you desire? What are you striving after, but what *have* you? What can you do *now*—to-day? Whatever that is, Christ says to you : "Use it; do it." You remember the words of the Spirit to that feeble Philadelphian church. He does not say to her, "Bestir yourself to do what the stronger churches of Sardis or of Thyatira have done," but "thou hast a little strength; I have set before thee an open door: hold fast that thou hast. Thou hast an opportunity, a door open before thee. Enter thy door. Thou hast a little strength; do not waste it, hold it fast." And what the spirit there says to the church, He says to you and to me as individuals. "An open door is before thee. Power of some kind



is in thy hand. Enter thy door. Go straight up before thee. What is that in thine hand? Use it, and use it now."

You have different gifts, but you each have some gift. The first requisite for efficient service is the consecration of your power. Of itself it is very little; but when Christ shall lay his hand on it, then neither you nor I can measure it. All that Paul could say about his own great gifts was that when Christ strengthened him, only then, he could do all things. So, with your power consecrated thus, begin to do the thing which God puts in your way; the little trivial duty as it may seem to you which lies nearest you. Begin to exercise your talent; it may be money; it may be speech; it may be song; it may be only the ability to give a book or a tract; it may be a loaf to a poor man, or a kind word to a sick woman. It may be only lying still and waiting patiently in pain and helplessness. Whatever it is, do it; always keeping in mind that the doing is unto Christ and gets all its significance and all its effect from him. You may see wonders wrought with your simple rod. Whether you do or not, you shall hear some day a word from those divine lips which shall open to you as in a flash the value which God sets on consecrated power: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

THE MULTIPLIED OIL.

2 KINGS IV.

- (1) Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead ; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord : and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.
- (2) And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee ? tell me, what hast thou in the house ? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil.
- (3) Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbors, even empty vessels ; borrow not a few.
- (4) And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full.
- (5) So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her ; and she poured out.
- (6) And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed.
- (7) Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.

## XIX.

### THE MULTIPLIED OIL.

THE poet Wordsworth says of one of his characters,

“ A primrose by the river's brim  
A yellow primrose was to him,  
And it was nothing more.”

The flower suggested nothing beyond itself. This is a condition of mind for which men are wont to receive praise from some quarters, as matter-of-fact men. That it is not a desirable nor a healthy state of mind, is evident from the fact that the Bible is constantly at work to lift men out of it. The Bible never touches a fact of nature or of our common life, that it does not exhibit its connection with something outside itself, and that a spiritual truth, pointing upward to God. God all and in all is the great underlying truth of Scripture, and therefore it never shrinks from associating the meanest, commonest, and most familiar things with God; nay, it rather emphasizes His relation to these, for the reason that man would naturally overlook it, and associate Him only with what seemed to himself grand and worthy. But if you will think of it for a moment, some of the most

insignificant and commonplace things are permanently identified, through the agency of the Bible, with the grandest and sweetest divine truths. You cannot look at a loaf of bread, and think only of flour and leaven and your daily hunger. The thoughts of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, are, as it were, kneaded into the loaf. A single hair, a twittering sparrow, a common field flower, carry the sublime lesson of providence. A sheep is a reminder of divine compassion. Or take this article oil; so common in our domestic life, still more so in that of the East; what may not a single flask of oil suggest of the early worship of Jehovah; of the imposing rites of the sanctuary; of anointed kings and priests; of plenty and gladness? What holy and tender associations linger about the Mount of Olives. And here, God has taken one little flask of oil in the home of an obscure woman in a far-off time, and has put it in a setting of miracle, and hands it to us, bidding us pour out and see how richly He can make it flow with lessons of grace for the instruction of His church.

The woman in the narrative was a prophet's widow. Her husband had been a faithful servant of God, leaving behind him a reputation founded on the only basis which will stand; and which enabled his widow to appeal confidently to the Lord's prophet, saying, "Thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord." Like not a few of the Lord's true prophets, even in modern times, he had died in debt, having perhaps suffered from Jezebel's vindictive persecution of his order; and now the creditors were press-

ing the widow for payment, and, in the absence of all effects, were preparing to enforce that provision of the Levitical law, which allowed a creditor to hold a debtor's children to servitude until the arrival of the year of Jubilee.

Her first thought in her trouble was of God as represented by His prophet. It could not have been a new thing for her to call upon God in the day of trouble. The history of the prophetic order in that period makes it quite certain that she had known affliction before this; and the pressure of care, and the teaching and example of that God-fearing husband, with what other influences we know not, perhaps similar ones in her childhood's history, had taught her the lesson of casting her burden on the Lord.

Elisha was not, in his own nature, one to resist such an appeal, and besides, as a prophet of God, none knew better than he the peculiar interest and sanctity with which the divine law invested the widow and the orphan. He was prompt in his response; not merely as a man who is liberal in good words, but as one who rouses his energies to do what he can. "What shall I do for thee?" But his next words must have seemed strange to her: "What hast thou in the house?" She had told him she was destitute. She had come to him for aid, and yet he turned back to her own house, and asked what there was there.

The opening of that house-door is the opening of a familiar truth of God's administration; namely, that

God, in working for men, uses them and their possessions as far as they will go. Often a man goes to God for help, in abject need, feeling that he has absolutely nothing wherewith to help himself, and is surprised at being told to go back and look over his own resources. It is just as when a boy in the country is at play out in the fields, and the little cart to which he has harnessed his dog or goat breaks down. "Ah!" he says to his companion, "it's a real bad break. I can't mend it, and we shall have to walk a mile and a half to the blacksmith's." Just then the boy's father comes by. He examines the break and says: "Haven't you something in your pocket that you can mend it with?" "No," replies the lad; "it will have to go to the blacksmith's." "Well, let me see what you have." And the little fellow begins to pull out that miscellaneous mass which always gathers in a school-boy's pocket: a handful of marbles, a piece of chalk, two or three yards of string, an apple, and one or two screws. "There," he says, "that's all. You can't mend it with any of those." "Stop," says the father; "give me one of those screws." And he sits down and skilfully joins and fastens the broken part, and sends the boy off to his play happy, and admiring his father's skill. Just so God calls our attention to some little thing which we had not thought worth mentioning among our possessions, and says, "use that." The widow had not thought of paying her debt with the oil which she had in the house. It was not a jar of oil as we are accustomed to think, but only a little flask, used for anointing. Probably



there was not half a pint in all, yet the prophet seizes upon this. "What hast thou in the house? Only a little flask of oil? That is the very thing. That shall pay thy debt, and save thee thy children." A flask of oil was not worth counting in liquidation of the widow's debt; but a flask of oil and God were good for any amount. And one of our errors is that, while we, perhaps, see the truth up to this point, we do not see it as a universal truth. We confine it to the occasional miracles of history; whereas these miracles are only illustrations of the law of God's economy in all time; *that power, consecrated to God, multiplies according to God's rule and not according to man's.* That law is in force just as much now as in the days of Elisha or of Christ. When there is something to be done, something for you to do, God says to you, "What have you to do it with?" And you are very likely to say—"Nothing, absolutely nothing. A very little money, a very small share of personal influence, a little gift of tongue or of pen, or possibly only the power to pray; but these are nothing. I have nothing fit to do this work." God rebukes you. He tells you plainly you look at the matter in the wrong way. He says to you, "Do you call yourself My child; and do you think you are living under the narrow, niggardly economy of men? Am I restricted to what men call great means to bring to pass great results? Cannot I, who made you and the world out of nothing, do this work with your little gift, as well as with something greater? Bring forth your little money. Utter your little word. Write your little

line. Breathe your prayer, and see what your Father in heaven can do.

If this faith was not largely developed in the widow, she had at least enough of it to obey the prophet's singular order to go and borrow vessels from all her neighbors. It may have crossed her mind that the command had something to do with the oil; but whether this were so or not, she wasted no time in asking questions, but obeyed. In temporal things faith comes *after* experience. In spiritual things, faith comes first, and experience afterward. What her experience was going to be, she did not know; what God might be going to do, she did not know; what she had to do she did know, and she simply did her work, and left God to do His in His own way and time. Oh, if we did but get hold of this simple law of living, the law of the obedience of faith, how much life would be both simplified and enriched. From this point of view the whole matter is so clear, so unembarrassed. All the responsibility for results is God's. No strain comes on His child. All the ordering of methods is God's. The child need not perplex himself. All the power is God's, the child needs but to draw on it as he wants it. All the care is God's; the child is bidden to cast it all on Him; and for the child there remains only simple obedience. The trouble is, that the child is not willing to humble himself so far under the mighty hand of God as to cast *all* care on Him. Simple obedience is altogether too simple for him. He wants a hand in the other department of the partnership. He wants to trim

his obedience according to his notion of the results ; and therefore he complicates matters, and lives, not the sweet, simple, restful, triumphant life of faith, but the worried, blundering, defeated life of the half-sight, which is all that his human ignorance permits him to catch of God's plans and methods.

The thing which this widow was bidden to do was peculiarly significant. She was about to receive a great blessing from God, and she had not room enough to receive it. Probably she had a number of empty vessels in the house ; but the destined blessing was to be far greater than the emptiness of her house ; and she must provide accordingly. Is not this something more than a mere side incident of the story ? Is there not here the hint of a truth which will repay a little study ? Do we ever think that sometimes God cannot bless us as richly as He would because we are not prepared to receive a large blessing ? It is true ; and it is farther true that, in accordance with the same law which we have already considered, God throws a part of this work of preparation on us. If you will look at the chapter just before this, you will find an illustration of the truth. When the three kings of Judah, Israel, and Edom were marching against the Moabites through the wilderness of Edom, and the water failed, and the host called upon God, God promised to send water for both man and beast, and to give victory besides. "Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain ; yet that valley shall be filled with water. . . . And this is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord : He will deliver the Moabites

also into your hand." But the host must make preparation. They must fill the valley with ditches. And the ditches were dug; and while the host were sleeping, afar off on the mountains of Edom, where the sound of wind and rain could not reach their ears, the rain fell, and the mountain channels were filled, and with the rising sun the pools seemed to deluded Moab tinged with the blood of an army divided against itself, and they rushed forward only to be overwhelmed with defeat.

A great deal of this digging ditches and borrowing vessels is often needful before we are in a condition to receive some of God's best gifts. There is, for instance, the preparation which comes in the development of a larger sense of need. Men must have great wants before they begin to make great requests; and very often they are scantily supplied because they seek only the supply of certain familiar and comparatively small needs; only to fill the empty vessels in their own houses. The very richest of God's blessings come to him who has nothing but God, and is therefore compelled to seek his all in God. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." But many a man is so well supplied in his own esteem, that his range of conscious need is very limited. He must have it enlarged ere he can receive those large blessings which are made to fit into the great abysmal needs of the human heart. And God does such a man a service when He leads him outside the little space hemmed in by his self-satisfaction and conceit, and shows him

the great empty spaces in his life ; when care and weakness and grief, and the sense of sin and ignorance bring empty vessels into his house, which there is no one on earth to fill. He learns to ask large things very quickly then. And not unfrequently one's neighbors help him to this. To a man who has real manhood in him, contact with other men is a wonderful developer of the sense of need. He cannot be long with wiser men without having borne into him a keen sense of his own ignorance. He cannot live with a richly-endowed spiritual life, which moves in an atmosphere of prayer and has its conversation in heaven, without an enlarged and quickened craving for the richer life of heaven.

Then, too, there are certain blessings which can come to one only through the enlargement of his sympathies. He who shuts himself up within his own little circle of refinement and culture and selfish pleasure, and never goes forth as God's minister of joy and help to a lower, darker region, to which taste and comfort and hope are alike strangers, does not know the blessing there is for him there : Christ's blessing that waits on ministry. He can get that new enjoyment only by going down after it ; and every poor man he visits and relieves ; every burdened heart he makes lighter ; every tear he wipes away, is the creator of an enlarged capacity for a purer happiness. The man who is content to live within his little sectarian circle, and who has brought himself to believe that no good lies outside it, is not open to the joy of a broader Christian fellowship. He cannot



receive it until he goes out of his own door. The very capacity for it is a vessel which he must get from his neighbor. There was such a joy in store for Peter, in the grander view of Christ's mission, in the fellowship of such faithful Gentile souls as Cornelius ; but his heart must first be enlarged to take in the Roman centurion, by the vision which God sent him on the house-top.

And the same is true in familiar religious experience. Prayer is a wonderful medium of blessing, and yet the apostle bids us watch *unto* prayer, with a view to prayer, before we pray, that we may enter the closet prepared to hear what God the Lord shall speak, and to receive the largest measure of what He shall have to bestow. The man who rushes into his closet out of the seething of a life into which not one thought of God has entered since his last formal act of prayer, is in no condition to receive God's spiritual gifts. The man who depends upon the Sabbath services or the weekly prayer-meeting to lift him twice or thrice in the week out of an atmosphere of utter worldliness, will not find himself lifted very high. It is rather he who sets his mind in his daily task to hallow all he finds : he whose

“ Is the bliss of souls serene  
When they have sworn, and steadfast mean,  
Counting the cost, in all t' espy  
Their God, in all themselves deny : ”

and who, in the outworking of this high purpose, has grown distrustful of self, and hungry for the continual

presence of God ; it is he who comes to the place of prayer as the dweller in a thirsty land goes forth at the rising of a cloud, setting all his vessels to catch the gift of the skies ; it is he whose vessels are filled. Do you know why David, even in the cave in which he hid from Saul, could sing so joyously, as in the fifty-seventh Psalm, "Awake up, my glory ; awake, psaltery and harp ; I myself will awake early. I will praise Thee, O Lord, among the people ; I will sing unto Thee among the nations?" You will find the reason in the seventh verse : "My heart is *prepared*,<sup>1</sup> O God, my heart is prepared."

The vessels, being thus procured, the widow was commanded by the prophet to shut herself in her house with her sons, and to pour out the flask of anointing oil into the vessels. Here, again, there was room for doubt. That little flask, and that great array of empty vessels. It seemed absurd that the less could fill the greater. But, as before, she obeyed without question. She began to pour, and in a moment she saw that a mightier hand than hers was at work. Vessel after vessel was filled, and still the sons handed fresh vessels, and bore them away full like the rest ; and still, without a thought in her believing heart of the stream being stayed, she held the flask's mouth downward and called for still another vessel, and there was not another. Her own and her neighbors' jars were full ; and then, and not till then, the oil stayed.

---

<sup>1</sup> Such is the meaning of "*fixed*."



Two or three thoughts force themselves upon us at this point in the story. Look at that picture of the widow and her children alone in the house, without the presence even of the prophet of God, the door shut against all intrusion and observation, and that wondrous display of miraculous power going on for that humble family alone. Miracle, in God's administration, is not an idle display to catch the eye of the crowd. Many a wise man of this world would have said, "Such a marvel of divine energy should not have been confined to two or three poor, perhaps ignorant people, and shut up within a little cabin. It should have been exhibited in open day before crowds of the learned and thoughtful. Grant that it was an act of mercy. Less would have satisfied the widow's want. No need for such an exertion of power." Ah! such have to learn that God has nothing too good or too great for the poorest soul that loves and trusts Him. Such reason as if mighty works of this kind were as strange to God as to them, not realizing that they are the familiar facts of His very being; that such words as those which raised Lazarus from the dead, and changed the water into wine, and set the paralytic leaping for joy, are household words to Him. There was only a single prophet of the Lord, at Dothan, in the day when the Syrian host compassed it about; and yet the anointed eyes of his servant saw the whole mountain round about full of the chariots and armies of God. They were there for the sake of Elisha alone; and that poor servant who had cried, "Alas, my master, and how shall we do?" learned,

as in a flash of light, that the whole host of heaven is not too much to enlist when a single servant of God is in need or in danger.

And then, too, what beautiful suggestions of family devotion flow to us from within the widow's closed doors. Mother and children alike employed; one pouring, another holding the vessel, another storing away the treasure. God's miracles of grace, God's sweetest and most blessed demonstrations of spiritual power, are not withheld from the humblest family altar, any more than from the public sanctuary. How is it, father, mother, when the doors are shut on you and your household group in the morning or in the evening, is there good store of vessels to receive the treasure? Do you come with prepared hearts to the family altar? Or do you come only to preserve family order and outward religious decency, not thinking it possible that your familiar service may be the scene of God's manifestation, and your household altar glow with such fire as that which fell upon Elijah's sacrifice on Carmel? How is it? Are all of your household group present as participators in your household worship? Oh, those little flasks in God's hand! How much they pour out sometimes. How God sometimes strikes a fountain of thought or of feeling in the artless question of the youngest of the group. Often the head of the household hesitates to set up the family altar, just because he thinks only of how little the flask is; how limited his power of expression; how small his gift in prayer; how little his education perhaps, so that he hesitates to

read the word of God aloud. My friend, let the flask alone ; think of God's touch upon the oil. The great question with you at the family altar is not how well you can pray or expound the Scriptures, but, *is God there?* If so, never mind the flask ; take it and pour out ; and that hand which multiplied the oil shall fill even your broken petition with the very spirit of grace and supplication, and make the verse which the youngest child stammeringly reads, run like a stream from the river of God. The vessels shall be filled. There ought to be more such miracles at the household altars. But it is the old fault, the old mistake, one of the deepest rooted in all our religious life—that we are not to expect God in familiar scenes ; that special divine gifts are reserved for special occasions. And so while the river of divine power, broad and deep, flows at our very thresholds, we refuse to launch our boats and dip our pitchers, waiting for some laboriously cut canal of man's devising. These familiar channels are the very ones through which we ought to expect—through which God encourages and teaches us to expect the richest, sweetest, deepest manifestations of His grace.

There is another thought at which I can only glance : that the divine gift was, in kind, of the same character as the original possession. She had only a little oil, and God paid her debt with oil. God might have heaped up the floor with gold. He might have filled the jars with wine, but there would have been, or so it looks to us, an incongruity in that. But the miraculous gift was in beautiful harmony

with the original gift. It was just so at Zarephath, in the house of that other widow. She had only a little meal and a little oil. God might have fed her as He did Elijah, by means of the ravens, but He did it by means of her own barrel and cruse. When the five thousand were assembled, and were hungry, it was entirely possible for Christ, by a word, to make fruit trees, laden with fruit enough for the whole multitude, grow up over their heads. Instead of this he used what was at hand. There was a little bread and fish, and he fed them with bread and fish. And I think you have found, or will find, in your own experience of God's gifts, that when God sets you to looking for what you have, asks you "What hast thou in the house?"— it is that He may make that thing the vehicle of your blessing. I have somewhere heard of one who had no gift to preach, but some power to pray. God took what he had, and developed that ; and the man prayed, and prayed, until he became a power in the church ; until his very presence in a congregation inspired the minister of the word with faith, and lent unction and might to the preaching of the truth. That woman who anointed the feet of Jesus, had only a single flask of ointment, as the widow of oil. Christ did not give that woman a name in his church through anything but that flask of ointment ; but the odor of that ointment is as sweet and penetrating this day as it was in Simon's banqueting chamber. That one act has been a lesson to the church for nineteen centuries, gathering power and meaning as men have gained insight into

the character and work and teaching of the Son of man.

So I might dwell on the abundance of the supply of oil. More than enough was given her to pay her debt. She asked but to satisfy her creditors, and God gave her that and a living besides. And it is worth noting how beautifully the light is thrown backward from the gospel upon this incident. This same fulness of giving comes out in the parable of the friend at midnight, who, when he did rise at his neighbor's importunity, gave not only three loaves but as many as he needed.

So, too, I might speak of the fact that, having received God's gift, the widow sought God's direction in the use of it. When the vessels were full, she went and told the man of God. Our contact with God is not intended to be occasional. It is to be a *life* of faith; and hence God often sends a gift so large that it embarrasses us, and sends us again and again to the mercy-seat to learn how to deal with what has been so bountifully given.

We leave this beautiful narrative here. Is it not a striking proof of the heavenly origin of the Scriptures, that these old lessons and stories, dealing with the men and habits of an age so remote and so different from our own, have still a power to instruct us in our duty to our own age, and to quicken our religious thought, and make closer our contact with heaven? Oh, if you feel yourselves needy to-day, listen to God's voice as it turns you upon yourselves to examine your own resources. And when you find

only some poor little gift, hesitate not to bring it into use. Its very littleness will turn your thought from it to Him whose word can multiply and fructify it. Only learn this lesson of trust and of obedience. Put yourselves in contact with God. Give out what you have, and leave the "excellency of the power" where it belongs, with God. Not only your vessels, but your neighbors' shall be filled. You deal with a God to whom wonders are familiar things; and faith shall make them familiar to you likewise, and shall keep your life in that high plane where God manifests Himself as He doth not unto the world.





THE ETERNITY OF GODLY  
CHARACTER.

I JOHN II.

(17) And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof : but  
he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.

## XX.

### THE ETERNITY OF GODLY CHARACTER.

It is plain to us all that men habitually seek what is permanent. Whatever mistakes they may make in their conceptions of permanency, or in their modes of seeking it, they want what is sure, steadfast, abiding. This is true in their living and in their thinking. Out of the restlessness and shifting of their active life they look forward to a time when they shall be "settled." They are busy making for themselves what they call established reputations and permanent fortunes. They are ambitious to continue to live in the memory and in the admiration and gratitude of men after they shall have died. Under this motive, they have made conquests and established dynasties; they have piled pyramids and built colossal sepulchres, and carved sphynxes, have written books and painted pictures.

So it is in thinking. They look for solid ground from which to think. They push back from facts to the principle behind them. They are not satisfied with seeing the apple fall. They must know what immutable law has regulated the fall of every apple that has dropped since the foundation of the world. They search for the eternal centre of the physical

universe, for the key-note of nature, for the fixed laws of their own intellectual being.

But the most important question of all to men, is the question of their *personal* permanency: "Shall I live forever, and how shall I live forever?" They may be anxious to be favorably remembered; to leave the world abiding tokens of their skill and industry and genius; but above all rise the questions, "Shall *I* abide as well as my work? *How long* shall I abide? *Where* shall I abide?" You cannot lay such questions with such an icicle as this which I read not long ago in a leading periodical: "Our future is simply an active existence prolonged by society. There is no promise, be it plainly said, of anything but an immortality of influence. We cannot even say that we shall continue to love, but we know that we shall be loved. It may be that we shall consciously know no hope ourselves, but we shall inspire hopes. It may be that we shall not think, but others will think our thoughts and enshrine our minds." That may satisfy an exceptional man here and there; the average man's instinct will reject it. He will not surrender his eternal personality at the word of a philosopher. He will come back, persistently, obstinately, blindly, if you will, to the old question, "How shall I abide forever?"

Whether we may think that the Bible answers the question or not, we cannot help seeing that it is meant to do so. Personal immortality is the thought which underlies and pervades its whole movement. It is, indeed, true that the thought does not often come

distinctly to the surface throughout the earlier stages of Bible history ; but, from the moment that the first man forfeited the gift of immortality by his disobedience, the purpose of recovery enters into the course of the history, and gives direction to it, and animates the words of prophecy, until the promise of the past is fulfilled in Christ, who comes to bring life and immortality to light through his gospel.

Our text, therefore, gathers up into itself what is diffused over the whole of Scripture, and meets the questioner with a distinct and exhaustive answer. You may abide forever. Not your memory, not your works. These may abide, but not forever. They may abide as long as the world, but the world is not forever. It passeth away. *You* may abide forever. "The world passeth away, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

How may this be ? And first we are told how it cannot be. It cannot come to pass through anything earthly. The warning is explicit, not to attach the thought of permanency to anything on earth, nor to the world itself. And it is worth noting how this is put. It is not that the world is *destined* to pass away. It is not such a warning as an experienced builder would give to a man who should be intending to put his house upon ground apparently firm, but which the builder knew would one day bring the house about his ears. It is rather as though one should call his neighbor's attention to the already begun movement of a land-slide. The thing is already at work. It appeals to observation now. The world *is passing away*. You

have but to look and you may see. Just stand where you are to-day, and see what is behind you ; the past, that which has already gone by. What a tremendous range your backward look takes in. It is an oppressive thought, how much of the passing away is already accomplished. What a long, dimming perspective of passed-away things—men by scores of millions, empires, nations. And to-day we say, jubilantly, “the world moves.” Yes, it does, and no doubt toward something better, and yet it is none the less moving *away*. We say, jestingly, “we are getting on.” Surely we are. Our children—but yesterday we heard their infant prattle, to-day they are our companions. It seems as though the echo of our own boyish laughter was yet in our ears, but the struggle of manhood is on us in all its intensity. The world is passing away. The men to whom we used to look up as to kings, and for whom the instinctive reverence still lives in our hearts, are gone and well-nigh forgotten. There have been certain things we always meant to do. The time had not come, but it would come presently. Well, we have come to where we have quietly faced and accepted the fact that they never will be done. The opportunity has gone. Some of you, when you sit down and begin to call up old companions and schoolmates, find that you are almost alone. Your class in college—how many are left? There are more of them in the other world than here. That was a significant phrase which the old Romans had to express the fact of a man’s death: “he has gone over to the majority.” The world is passing away. Oh, how the years rush!

A summer day used to be so long. It is so short now. The holidays used to seem so far apart : there is only a step between them now, and the anniversaries, especially the birthdays, fairly crowd upon each other's heels ; and some of you are well-nigh done. You have been setting your houses in order, and you find yourselves now and then looking forward into your own vacant place, and wondering who will be sitting at your desk and doing your work. You have secured a few feet of ground in God's acre, perhaps the only real estate left of acres that have passed away. It will not be long now. The world passeth away.

Well, all that sounds sadly enough, but I know not after all if we need grow sad over it. If the world is all we have, and if our all is passing away with the world, it *is* sad enough, surely. But there was a good deal more than a jest in the reply which a well known man of letters made to a friend, who said : "They say that the world is coming to an end within so many years." "Well," replied the other, "let it come to an end. We can get on very well without it." That is the very point. *Can* we do very well without it?

We come back again to our text. There is such a thing as eternal abiding, independently of the world. Abiding forever is not affected by the fact that the world passeth away. It passeth, but he that doeth the will of God abideth, and that forever. *There* is the divine law of permanency. It resides in doing the will of God.

And that phrase, doing the will of God, carries with it, as the inevitable condition of abiding forever,



the truth of subjugation. Permanency here, so far as anything can be permanent here, and eternal life, come through a man's doing another will than his own, and consequently through the subjugation of his own will. Subjugation. You know the word, coming and being under a yoke ; and that, to not a few minds, seems a strange preparation for such glory and triumph as are implied in the words "abiding forever." Many a man will be tempted to say : "Why, such subjugation will wreck my manhood at the outset ; and then farewell to anything permanent or valuable in my life."

And yet subjugation is not necessarily ruin. In certain spheres with which you are quite familiar it is the indispensable condition of value and power.

For instance, there is a mass of quartz containing gold. The question is not whether it is beautiful, everybody acknowledges that. Not whether it is precious ; it has gold in it ; but whether, as it stands, it is the best it is capable of being. The master says no. It is of no use in its present state but to be put into a cabinet to be looked at. There is value in it, but not in its present shape. The first condition of developing that value is subjugation. The quartz, if it could reason about the matter, might say, "My crystals are beautiful. I am flecked with precious gold. I am good enough as I am ; and for me to go into the crusher is simply to ruin me." And yet, into the crusher it must go. The beautiful crystals must be broken all to pieces. The crusher is not enough. The fire comes next. More subjugation.

tion ; it is run into a mould and shaped according to the master's will. The ingot goes to the mint. Still more subjugation. It is cut in pieces. It is moulded into circular disks ; and at last, down comes the die of the coining press upon each piece, and the gold, so different from what it was when buried in the quartz, is not ruined. For the first time it is a power. The sign of a great state is upon it. It represents far more than its own actual value. It bears the image of a king or the emblems of a commonwealth. It no longer represents crude nature as it did when it was mixed up with the quartz, but it represents organization, civilization, fleets, armies, sovereignty. From the stamp of the coining press it has received a *character*, which you know means a mark. Whatever virtue, or power, or wealth is represented by the state is conveyed into those pieces; and through that character, won only through subjugation, the gold becomes a permanent element of the world's commerce, a factor in that vast and complicated system called finance.

Now, if you carry the illustration up into man's moral life, you will find it fully borne out. Character is all that abides, and character comes to man as to money, only through subjugation. When God takes a man in hand, it is that He may make him a partaker of eternal life ; and to this end He must set the stamp of His own character upon him. Hence He tells us by His apostle, that He called His children "to be conformed to the image of His Son," to be like Jesus Christ who is "the brightness of His

glory and the express image of His person." And Christ, when he comes to carry out this design of the Father, distinctly invites men to subjugation, to come under the yoke: "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me." His demand goes to the very roots of the man's life: "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny *himself*." That means a great deal more than his doing without something that he likes. To deny self is *to say that self is not*. It is to make self practically inoperative wherever the will of Christ is concerned. Let him take up the cross. That is only the figurative expansion of the same thought. The cross is just what its name imports. It is the crossing of man's will with God's; its burden is the struggle of man's heart to say, "Thy will and not mine be done;" and the coming under that burden is subjugation.

So when a man comes into God's hands, asking, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" he goes through much the same process as the gold does. There is a good deal of crushing of the false growths which have crystallized in his life; a good deal of sifting to get at the disordered, scattered elements of his moral power, so that they may be run into the mould of some definite purpose; a good deal of fiery trial before he falls into the lines of duty. But through all this, God's mark comes upon him. The image and superscription of the Great King shines out in him. He acquires a character which is the expression of the will of God and of the order of the kingdom of heaven.

But subjugation has another side, an active side which we must not overlook because it is expressed in the text. It is service. Not only is man to be subject to God's will, but God's will must be done. To go back to the figure, it is not enough that gold be coined. It must circulate. Shut up those eagles and half-eagles in a safe, and they might as well not have been coined; they were coined to circulate. And what circulation is to money, service is to character. It is not only its natural consequence, it completes the idea of character. It is its active side. Character without service is character maimed. But you are to remember that service gets its quality from character. Men estimate service according to a rule of their own. They distinguish between great and small services, and they applaud the great, and care nothing about the small. But it is with Christian service as with coinage. The eagle may, it is true, represent more power than the dime; but the stamp of the state is on both, and gives a value and dignity to the dime as well as to the eagle. And in Christian service God's mark upon it is the great thing. God's test of service is not whether it is great or small; but whether it is the expression of His spirit and will; whether it bears His character. A man's service may be fragmentary, all broken up into small change, if I may so speak; yet if each fragment be stamped with Christ's image, God honors the service none the less. You see that thought very plainly brought out in the parable of the talents. The commendation of the servants does not turn on their hav-

ing brought interest for five or for two talents. It is given to the character of fidelity stamped upon both services. "Well done, good and *faithful* servant." There is that poor widow casting her two mites into the treasury. Why has the act come down to us embalmed with Christ's praise? Not for the amount she gave, but for the nobility of the impulse behind the gift, the Christlike devotion which made her cast in all her living. There is the woman breaking the alabaster box of ointment upon Christ's head. A little service it was. A little ointment wasted (or so the disciples thought). A sweet odor lingering for awhile in the house. Was that all? Why, then, is the perfume of that ointment still fresh in the courts of the Christian church? Not for the gift, but for the penitent's love to Christ. Our Lord states this principle, that character gives quality to service, in those words in the tenth chapter of Matthew: "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, (because he is Christ's disciple, and out of the impulse of love for Christ,) I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward."

And the men who thus, through subjugation of self, and through service, bear God's mark, are the men who abide. Their works abide. There is something in the permanency of character and of its fruits which foreshadows its eternal abiding. You see it in familiar instances. Take the man or the woman in your own circle of acquaintance whom you admire and love most, or whose memory you cherish most

dearly. What is it that you cherish? It is not their wealth, not their brilliancy, not their learning or accomplishments, but they stand marked in your mind and memory by their moral traits. The other things are merely circumstances; these things are wrought up with their personality. These *make* them; and it is character and not circumstance which you love. When circumstances change and pass away with the rest of the world, these things abide. They are independent of the world; they are God's sign manual, showing that the man belongs to another and a higher order of things; that he has his citizenship in heaven.

Look back to your school days. The teacher who has left his mark most deeply upon you was not always the most brilliant or the most learned one. It was the best man. He set his stamp below the region of your culture in the best part of your nature; and even though he may have had the learning of a Bacon, or the genius of a Milton, it is the man himself, daily living out God's truth, and radiating God's love, who abides in your memory and in your life by the simple power of character.

You cannot help seeing, as you read history, how character overtops achievement. There is Abraham, a prince, a warrior, a conqueror, the progenitor of a mighty nation; and yet it is to none of these that the world pays honor. These are only incidental to the great moral facts of faith and obedience. Abraham represents to the world, not victory, not wealth, not population. All these attached to him, but all these



have passed away. He represents character ; and the power of his character is working as vigorously in the nineteenth century as in the infancy of time. Job was a rich man, and a man of influence ; but who thinks of Job's riches now ? Who does not think of his patience ? Yea, the character which came so triumphantly out of that fiery trial is a proverb to-day, even upon the lips of scoffers. David was a conqueror, but the interest of his moral history swallows up the interest of his conquests. David represents to the world a divine call, and a moral shipwreck, and a moral retrieval, and the expression of devotion through the Psalms, rather than the victories over Philistia and Moab and Ammon. And Jesus, surely his impress on the world is the impress of character. He rises above all his circumstances. His works and his words take all their meaning from the fact that he does and speaks them. They are immortal because his character is divine ; and when men receive the impression of Christ, their first, spontaneous utterance is not, "Behold the works or the words," but "behold *the man!*"

Thus, as far as anything on earth can be said to abide, character abides. As the greatest movements of history are its moral movements, so the men who live in the world's memory and gratitude are those who survive through character and not through achievement ; the men whose subjugation to the will of God has made them forgetful of self, and willing to be broken up in love's service of the world : who have lived not to be ministered unto, but to minister. Yes,



character abides. You have heard the story of the Egyptian king who employed an architect to build him a lighthouse, and who bade him cut the royal name upon it. But the architect covered the tower with plaster on which the royal cipher stood forth right boldly, while deep into the heart of the granite beneath he cut his own name. And the years passed, and the plaster crumbled, and the king's name vanished, while the architect's remained. Man's beauty and strength, his gains and his exploits, are graven as in plaster; and as the generations drop their dews and snows upon them they are gone; but character is written as "with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever." It bears God's stamp, and is immortal because God is immortal. Go down the portrait gallery of the world's great ones and draw comparisons for yourselves. Alexander and Paul, the conquests of ambition and the conquests of devotion. Plato and David, the inspiration of culture and the inspiration of heaven. Napoleon the man of destiny and Luther the man of faith. Whose empire is the larger and the mightier? Which gives the greater promise of permanence? Hands unclasp, and loving eyes close to open no more, but the love which is the fulfilling of the law does not pass away. The martyr is crucified, but the truth lives on and leavens the world. The Christian dies, but his works follow him. And everything, great or small, which bears this mark of doing God's will, takes on, through this, an eternal nature. Things which the great world disregards, little services, kind words, patient waitings, hidden sacrifices,

none perish. Little dead born plans over which God's children weep because they had meant them, in good faith, as offerings to Christ, he gathers up as they drop from their nerveless grasp, and hides them in his bosom, and some day they shall come back with the hundred-fold interest of heaven.

So we begin to more than suspect that the permanency of character here is but the foreshadowing of a deeper, grander fact, namely, that godlike character is immortal *in its essence*. God's word asserts it. "He that doeth the will of God abideth forever." Character, inspired by God, won through subjugation to His will, and through doing His will, shall share His eternity. Well may we say, "Let the world pass, and the lusts thereof, if this may be our lot." Well may we say, "Let the cross press ever so heavily, let the discipline be ever so severe, let the self-surrender be complete, if we may abide forever with God." Eternity! a conception after which the thought pants on in vain through ages and cycles, and comes back baffled and exhausted; eternity with God's face unveiled, the springs of his wisdom forever open, with thought unshackled by sense, love untainted with passion, surrounded by the holy of all ages, and secure in the certainty of endless rest, this is the inheritance of character.

I come back, in conclusion, to the thought with which I began. You are seeking the permanent, the abiding, all of you. You want to get your feet upon something solid. What you want in your life, more than anything else, is the sense of fixedness. I ask

you, then, where are you seeking this? On what kind of a foundation are you building, and what are you building? Is it reputation, fortune, a palace of art, a literary retreat; and think you that when your structure is finished you shall go in and dwell there in unbroken peace, on foundations that never shall rock nor tremble beneath you? You build without the best warrant of all if this be so. God does not say these things shall abide. Nay, you have but to open your eyes, and see how the vast train of such builders, with their buildings, have passed away. And the world is passing away still. Oh, try and face eternity for a moment; try and feel the fact that to-morrow, or to-day it may be, you may quietly step across the line which bounds this earthly scene, and find yourself where all that is temporary and perishable has passed away like a dream, and nothing remains but what is real and eternal; and as you stand in thought upon that awful threshold, ask yourself, "What is there real about me? What have I, what am I that will stand the touch of eternity? The world will dwindle as you stand there. The interests which call out so much of your zeal and rivalry and labor will shrivel, and your own heart will tell you that God speaks truth when He says that he, and only he, who doeth the will of God abideth forever. Have you begun this work of building character? Have you put yourself under God's hands to be moulded into the image of Christ? Is your will shrinking from subjugation to Christ's yoke? Is your reason revolting from the demand of faith? I

can only say that if you will not accept these conditions I have no promise of immortality for you. I know of nothing but faith in Jesus Christ, and subjection to his will and word, which will develop god-like character; and I know of nothing but such character which has any promise of abiding forever. It is well that in this busy, distracting world, you should have some established connection with eternity. You know how in the Indian Ocean the pearl-diver, with weights tied to him to make him sink, plunges into the deep, and searches for the pearls on the bottom, yet having always a cord connecting with the surface by which he can ascend. My brethren, we are heavily weighted here. We are sunk deep in the eddies of business and of study; we are seeking treasure of one kind and another. Are we linked to eternity? Is there something which, in all the striving and whirl of our life, keeps us in contact with heaven and eternal life? This is the great thing after all. The world is passing away. We shall not be long in this whirlpool. What then? Shall we abide forever?

# Gates Into <sup>the</sup> Psalm-Country

BY

Rev. MARVIN R. VINCENT, D.D.

One Volume, 12mo, - - - - - \$1.50.

## CRITICAL NOTICES.

"The book may be cordially recommended to the perusal of young men especially, who will find in it the soundest views of life and the most elevated religious conceptions, enforced with equal kindness, eloquence, and power."—*New York Tribune*.

"As meditations upon that portion of Scripture designed for popular rather than critical reading, they are delightful. The thought is warm and earnest, and, like the Psalms themselves, these studies suggested by them deal with the common experiences of life."—*The Churchman*.

"In the execution of his design, Dr. Vincent has shown rare skill and ability. The work seems to us to be a model of its kind—scholarly, thoughtful, enriched but not encumbered by the results of the best learning, devout and cheerful in spirit, practical, sensible, and like the Psalms themselves, full of Christ and the Gospel. The style is singularly clear, racy, and incisive."—*New York Evangelist*.

"They are rich in spiritual counsel, graceful in style, happy in thought and illustration. The book is meant for the average Bible-reader, rather than for the scholar, and any devout Christian loving the Bible, will find in it an abundance of interesting and suggestive thought."—*Boston Watchman*.

"The treatment is deeply spiritual, the tone affectionate and earnest, and the style clear, direct, and often picturesque; and we are sure that many a Christian will find in the volume both instruction and solace, and varying helps for varying times of need."—*Boston Congregationalist*.

"They who thoughtfully read these pages find themselves not only illumined and refreshed by the immediate subject, but stimulated to make the Psalter fruitful under their own meditative study."

—*New York Christian Intelligencer*.

"Like the different parts of a beautiful garden, or the successive strains of sweet music, these discourses charm the soul and fill it with rapturous emotions. They are at the same time most helpful in the way of right living."—*Lutheran Quarterly*.

"Christians of every name will find strength and comfort in these essays, which are as sweet as they are simple, and as solid as they are unpretentious."—*The Living Church*.

by \*\*\* For sale by all booksellers, or will be sent, prepaid, upon receipt of price

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS,

NOS. 743 AND 745 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

# Old Faiths in New Light

BY

NEWMAN SMYTH,

Author of "The Religious Feeling."

---

One Volume, 12mo, cloth, - - - \$1.50.

---

This work aims to meet a growing need by gathering materials of faith which have been quarried by many specialists in their own departments of Biblical study and scientific research, and by endeavoring to put these results of recent scholarship together according to one leading idea in a modern construction of old faith. Mr. Smyth's book is remarkable no less for its learning and wide acquaintance with prevailing modes of thought, than for its fairness and judicial spirit.

## CRITICAL NOTICES.

"The author is logical and therefore clear. He also is master of a singularly attractive literary style. Few writers, whose books come under our eye, succeed in treating metaphysical and philosophical themes in a manner at once so forcible and so interesting. We speak strongly about this book, because we think it exceptionally valuable. It is just such a book as ought to be in the hands of all intelligent men and women who have received an education sufficient to enable them to read intelligently about such subjects as are discussed herein, and the number of such persons is very much larger than some people think."—*Congregationalist*.

"We have before had occasion to notice the force and elegance of this writer, and his new book shows scholarship even more advanced. \* \* \* When we say, with some knowledge of how much is undertaken by the saying, that there is probably no book of moderate compass which combines in greater degree clearness of style with profundity of subject and of reasoning, we fulfil simple duty to an author whose success is all the more marked and gratifying from the multitude of kindred attempts with which we have been flooded from all sorts of pens."—*Presbyterian*.

"The book impresses us as clear, cogent and helpful, as vigorous in style as it is honest in purpose, and calculated to render valuable service in showing that religion and science are not antagonists but allies, and that both lead up toward the one God. We fancy that a good many readers of this volume will entertain toward the author a feeling of sincere personal gratitude."—*Boston Journal*.

"On the whole, we do not know of a book which may better be commended to thoughtful persons whose minds have been unsettled by objections of modern thought. It will be found a wholesome work for every minister in the land to read."

—*Examiner and Chronicle*.

"It is a long time since we have met with an abler or fresher theological treatise than *Old Faiths in New Light*, by Newman Smyth, an author who in his work on "The Religious Feeling" has already shown ability as an expounder of Christian doctrine."—*Independent*.

---

\* \* \* For sale by all booksellers, or sent postpaid, upon receipt of price,  
by

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS,

NOS. 743 AND 745 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.



The  
*Conflict of Christianity*

**WITH HEATHENISM.**

By DR. GERHARD UHLHORN.

TRANSLATED BY

PROF. EGBERT C. SMYTH and REV. C. J. H. ROPES.

One Volume, Crown 8vo, \$2.50.

This volume describes with extraordinary vividness and spirit the religious and moral condition of the Pagan world, the rise and spread of Christianity, its conflict with heathenism, and its final victory. There is no work that portrays the heroic age of the ancient church with equal spirit, elegance, and incisive power. The author has made thorough and independent study both of the early Christian literature and also of the contemporary records of classic heathenism.

**CRITICAL NOTICES.**

"It is easy to see why this volume is so highly esteemed. It is systematic, thorough, and concise. But its power is in the wide mental vision and well-balanced imagination of the author, which enable him to reconstruct the scenes of ancient history. An exceptional clearness and force mark his style."—*Boston Advertiser*.

"One might read many books without obtaining more than a fraction of the profitable information here conveyed; and he might search a long time before finding one which would so thoroughly fix his attention and command his interest."—*Phil. S. S. Times*.

"Dr. Uhlhorn has described the great conflict with the power of a master. His style is strong and attractive, his descriptions vivid and graphic, his illustrations highly colored, and his presentation of the subject earnest and effective."—*Providence Journal*.

"The work is marked for its broad humanitarian views, its learning, and the wide discretion in selecting from the great field the points of deepest interest."—*Chicago Inter-Ocean*.

"This is one of those clear, strong, thorough-going books which are a scholar's delight."—*Hartford Religious Herald*.

\*.\* For sale by all booksellers, or sent post-paid upon receipt of price, by

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS,

NOS. 743 AND 745 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.



# Faith and Rationalism.

By Prof. GEORGE P. FISHER, D.D..

Author of "The Beginnings of Christianity," "The Reformation," Etc.

---

One Volume, 12mo, Cloth, \$1.25.

---

"This valuable and timely volume discusses ably, trenchantly and decisively the subjects of which it treats. It contains within small limits a large amount of information and unanswerable reasoning."—*Presbyterian Banner*.

"The book is valuable as a discussion of the mysteries of faith and the characteristics of rationalism by one of the clearest writers and thinkers."—*Washington Post*.

"The author deals with many of the questions of the day, and does so with a freshness and completeness quite admirable and attractive."—*Presbyterian*.

"This singularly clear and catholic-spirited essay will command the attention of the theological world, for it is a searching inquiry into the very substance of Christian belief."—*Hartford Courant*.

"This little volume may be regarded as virtually a primer of modern religious thought, which contains within its condensed pages rich materials that are not easily gathered from the great volumes of our theological authors. Alike in learning, style and power of discrimination, it is honorable to the author and to his university, which does not urge the claims of science by slighting the worth of faith or philosophy."—*N. Y. Times*.

"Topics of profound interest to the studious inquirer after truth are discussed by the author with his characteristic breadth of view, catholicity of judgment, affluence of learning, felicity of illustration, and force of reasoning. . . . His singular candor disarms the prepossessions of his opponents. . . . In these days of pretentious, shallow and garrulous scholarship, his learning is as noticeable for its solidity as for its compass."—*N. Y. Tribune*.

---

\*.\* The above book for sale by all booksellers, or will be sent, prepaid, upon receipt of price, by

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS, PUBLISHERS,

743 AND 745 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.











